



**WALKING AROUND
THE WORLD**

FROM THE ANNALS OF
HYPERPEDESTRIANISM

THE COSMIC JOKER ALIEN INTELLIGENCE AND THE PARANORMAL
TURKEY IN TINFOIL PRESIDENT ERDOGAN'S CONSPIRACY CENTRAL
MORE THINGS IN HEAVEN AND EARTH SHAKESPEARE VS SCEPTICS

CATTLE MUTILATIONS • AURORAL SOUNDS • WOMBAT TURDS • YUKIO MISHIMA'S UFOs

THE WORLD OF STRANGE PHENOMENA

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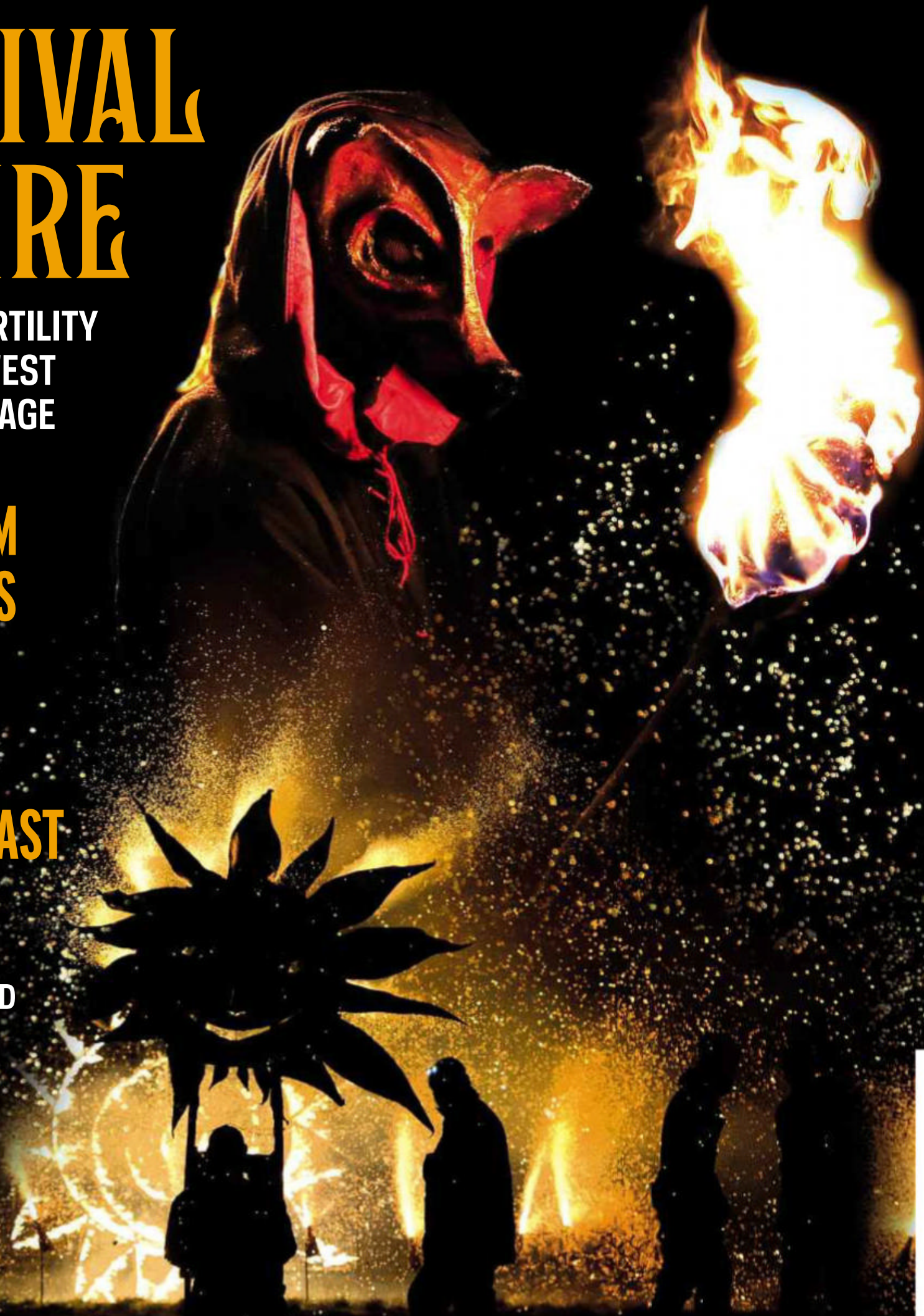
FLAMES AND FERTILITY
SYMBOLS IN A WEST
YORKSHIRE VILLAGE

RENDLESHAM REVELATIONS

WAS AN SAS PRANK
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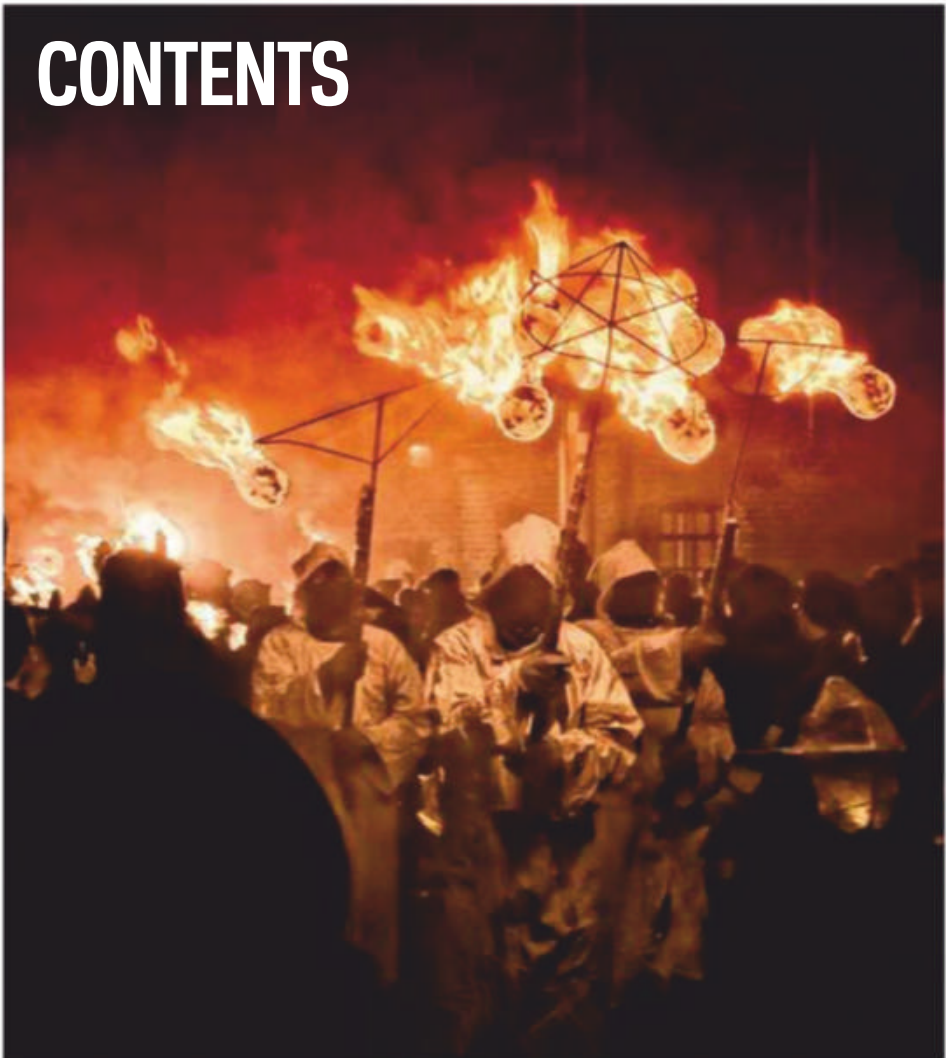
The Telegraph

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JIJI PRESS / AFP / GETTY IMAGES



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FORTEAN TIMES 376

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Everything you always wanted to know about *Fortean Times* but were too paranoid to ask!

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EDITORIAL



CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

TO DRIVE THE COLD WINTER AWAY

LIGHT MY FIRE

As we go to press, the Sun is shining brightly above Fortean Towers, giving us a foretaste of life when the short days and long nights of the British winter finally give way to the returning spring. Well, it's still a way off, but in the West Yorkshire village of Marsden, folks greet the season early, getting their celebrations in well before the vernal equinox. The Marsden Imbolc Fire Festival takes place every two years, driving the winter away with a riot of flaming torches, exploding fireworks and blazing fertility symbols. The last one took place in February 2018, when the intrepid Rob Gandy visited, possibly expecting a real-life rerun of *The Wicker Man*. Instead, he got a warm welcome in every sense and returned in one piece to file his story, which you'll find on p76. If you'd like to celebrate Imbolc in Marsden, you'll now have to wait for 1 February 2020 – so there's a date for your diary.



PLAYING TRICKS

Elsewhere in this issue you'll find plenty of other ways to while away the February nights. Alan Murdie (p18) asks whether the power of the Moon – evoked often enough in supernatural fiction – extends to influencing real-life spectral encounters, and discovers a rather surprising dearth of lunar spooks. On the other hand, David Hambling (p12) finds that traditional beliefs among dwellers in the Arctic Circle about hearing the Northern Lights may turn out to have some basis in fact: auroral sounds may be far more than auditory hallucination or folkloric fancy.

Talking of strange lights and funny sounds, interest in the Rendlesham Incident shows no sign of abating, with a new film and a major television series on the horizon. David Clarke, who has dealt with the subject a number of times in these pages, throws something new into the mix on p16: a letter from a purported special forces insider who claims the incident was the result of a prank played on US servicemen at RAF Bentwaters and RAF Woodbridge in Suffolk by a cheeky SAS (Special Air Service) squad out to put one over on the Yanks. Is this account remotely credible? Is it yet another hoax? Whatever

you make of the letter, it certainly adds another enjoyable layer to the already dense accretions of lore that now cover this nearly 40-year-old case: the truth may be out there, but we'd be surprised if we ever find out exactly what it is.

While the SAS are probably as fond of a good prank as anyone (notorious hoaxer Alan Abel, for instance; see p26 for his obit), perhaps there's a bigger trickster behind UFO incidents and other outbreaks of strangeness, from hauntings to bigfoot sightings. Peter McCue (p30) makes the case for the 'Cosmic Joker', asking whether there might be a single, unitary cause lurking behind the superficially diverse appearances of all kinds of strange phenomena. Could it be some form of higher intelligence, of unknown origin but clearly deceptive and manipulative in nature? Could it account for some of the baffling aspects of 'overlap' cases not readily amenable to traditional categorisation or analysis? As Peter admits,

this is highly speculative stuff, and will be rejected by believers in both the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis and those who favour psychosocial explanations for UFOs and other anomalies.

ERRATA

FT373:14: Richard George of St Albans, Herts, spotted what he described as a "serendipitous" typo on David Hambling's Science page: "I like the idea of a minor planet called Eric." The heavenly body in questions was, of course, Eris.

FT374:5: More misnaming in this issue's Conspirasphere column, where Noel Rooney referred to the director of the FBI (not once, but five times!) as Christopher Wary. As Dale Neiberg of Laurel, Maryland, emailed to point out: "The director may well be wary, given the current state of affairs stateside, but his name is actually Christopher Wray."


DAVID R. SUTTON


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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

TERROR IN THE ARCTIC

Inuit fear discovery of Franklin expedition wrecks has reawakened curse



ABOVE: HMS Terror trapped in the Arctic ice in a scene from the 2018 AMC horror drama series *The Terror*.

HMS Terror and its sister ship the *HMS Erebus* left England in May 1845 on the doomed expedition led by Sir John Franklin to navigate a route through the Northwest Passage (connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans). They became frozen in ice near Canada's King William Island in 1846 and none of the 129 men on board survived. The crew's final message, sent on 25 April 1848, indicated that the survivors were abandoning their ships. They left the two vessels north of King William Island and set out on a harsh journey south toward Fort Resolution, a Hudson's Bay Company outpost on the mainland, 600 miles (970km) to the southwest.

Judging by the bodies found so far, none of the remaining crew made it even a fifth of the way to safety. Autopsies of crewmembers revealed that their canned rations might

have been tainted by both lead and botulism. Oral reports by local Inuit that some of the crew members resorted to cannibalism were arguably supported by forensic evidence of cut marks on the skeletal remains of crewmembers found on King William Island.

The doomed mission was recreated in the Ridley Scott-produced TV horror drama series, *The Terror*, in which the sailors face starvation, mutiny, cannibalism and a demonic polar bear while trapped in the ice.

The wrecks were only discovered recently by Canadian divers near the remote Arctic settlement of Gjoa Haven on King William Island in the Nunavut Territories – *Erebus* in September 2014 and *Terror* in September 2016. *Terror* lay in Nunavut's Terror Bay (the clue might have been in the name,

given the bay back in 1910). It was 57 miles (92km) south of the location where the ship was reported abandoned, and some 30 miles (50km) from the wreck of the *Erebus*. Divers have been removing artefacts from the wrecks, which are expected to go on show at the Nattilik Heritage Centre in Gjoa Haven; but a spate of six unexpected deaths in the space of two weeks last August led to a belief among the 1,000 strong Inuit community that disturbing the wrecks has reawakened their curse.

"People are superstitious," said Jacob Keanik, whose brother and nephew drowned in a boating accident after the ships were found. "They feel there is a connection between the deaths and disturbing the wreck sites. My late mother told me, even before these shipwrecks were discovered... the whole of King William Island

has non-human people that we cannot see. It's a funny feeling when we get on the other side of the island. You sense that somebody's around you, but there's nobody around you." Keanik said his mother never made it clear whether she thought the invisible beings are the spirits of the lost Franklin crew, or whether they haunted the dying crewmembers in the mid-19th century.

Two other men died in an all-terrain vehicle rollover, a community elder passed away and a staff member at a local school succumbed to a heart attack. Tamara Tarasoff, an official with Parks Canada, the government agency protecting marine conservation areas, said the community "feel the wrecks are cursed and should not be disturbed". At a community meeting Fred Pedersen, of the Kitikmeot Inuit Association, said: "It is only artefacts that are being found and taken off wreck sites. There are plans in place that if any bodies are found, they will be left in place. We will not bring up or disturb human remains."

The late Louie Kamookak, an Inuit oral historian and Gjoa Haven resident who helped find the *Erebus*, blessed the shipwreck site in 2015 with sand taken from the community and sprinkled on the sea. Kamookak died of cancer at age 58 in March 2018, and the *Terror* shipwreck site did not receive a similar traditional blessing until two years after its discovery. Dominique Tessier, spokeswoman for Parks Canada, told Canadian radio: "Following the tragedies, elders blessed sand from Gjoa Haven and the guardians brought it to the wreck of *HMS Terror*, where they sprinkled it over the wreck and performed a blessing." [CBC] 18 Dec; telegraph.co.uk, 19 Dec; dailymail.co.uk. 20 Dec 2018.



SHITTING BRICKS

The wonders of cube-shaped wombat poo

PAGE 7



GHOSTS AND THE MOON

Do spectral sightings have a lunar element?

PAGE 18



DEATH OF A PRANKSTER

Alan Abel and the art of the hoax

PAGE 26

THE CONSPIRASPHERE

The QAnon phenomenon rumbles on, reports **NOEL ROONEY**, but even the enigmatic oracle seems to have admitted that conspirasphere icon JFK Junior is unlikely to return any time soon

DEATH OF A DEAD MAN

A curious incident took place at the recent American Priority Conference in Washington, DC. The conference is an initiative by the more radicalised sections of the Republican Party to replace the now vilified Conservative Political Action Conference get-togethers and to engage with their outlier kith and kin, though by all accounts it was poorly attended and didn't light any fires under the American right, alt, Trumpy or otherwise. Anthony Scaramucci, who served under the Donald, briefly, as the White House communications director, was addressing a mostly empty hall when he got into a conversation with a couple from Virginia, who, some reports suggest, were wearing a certain amount of QAnon-related regalia. He told them that Q had "been dead accurate about so many things" (clearly not a reference to the claim of Hillary Clinton's imminent arrest), and then added: "When you find out who he is, you're not going to believe it."

He's right, of course; some people are not going to believe it, whoever he knows/assumes/believes/fantasises the enigmatic and spotlight-shy Q (see **FT371:32-39**) to be. Partly that is because some have already decided they know who Q is: a whole spectrum of candidates has been proposed, ranging from Trump himself (does he have time with all that tweeting, and the little matter of his presidential duties?) to more or less unintelligible theories about an AI creation called #Tyler, spawned by a gentleman named Quinn Michaels, well-known in some parts of the Conspirasphere as a YouTube commentator on the Las Vegas shootings and the evils of cryptocurrencies. Whether Scaramucci does know the identity of Q, or just wants his old job back, the report of an erstwhile White House insider dropping hints of this sort (and intentionally or otherwise lending weight to the theory that Q himself is an insider) caused a predictable flurry of chatter around

the social media platforms regularly used by QAnon types.

That wasn't the only flurry in the last few weeks, which just goes to show that reports of Q's imminent demise as a conspiracy phenomenon (touted by, among others, tweeter and vlogger Defango) may yet turn out to be exaggerated. A dead man excited some debate and chatter, arbitrated ultimately by Q him/itself, when it turned out that he was, erm, dead, and probably had been for 20 years. JFK Junior died, or so the mainstream media (and the Kennedy family, and the rescuers who found his body) would have you believe, in an air crash in 1999. However, one of the running memes among the Q crowd is that he didn't die, but has in fact been playing a key role in the shadows for the Trump party against the Deep State, and has even appeared in the (not decomposed) flesh at Trump rallies. And, so it was said, the same JFK Jnr would appear publicly (and miraculously) on the 55th anniversary of his father's assassination.

And, of course, the Q Clock, a numerological apparatus used by many Q-proofers, was due to run out on 22 November 2018, the 55th anniversary of the death of JFK Senior. 55, or 5:5, is a key integer in Q numerology, and many adherents believed that 22 November was when the Storm would kick off in earnest. So it must have come as a disappointment to many when (a) nothing special happened on that date, and (b) a 4-Chan poster asked Q if JFK Jnr was actually dead, and the oracle answered in the affirmative. The believers will have to wait, expectantly, for the Storm; like Winter, or the Rapture, it's coming, and that's the best anyone can say for it. Dead accurate.

www.politico.com/story/2018/12/07/american-priority-conference-trump-1052214; beforeitsnews.com/v3/bloggng-citizen-journalism/2017/2583448.html; steemit.com/qanon/@titusfrost/qanon-is-dead-boom-thank-defango-for-exposing-the-truth-months-ago; www.dailydot.com/layer8/qanon-jfk-jr/

EXTRA! EXTRA!



FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

FISHERMAN WHO EXPOSED HIMSELF IN NORTHERN IRELAND TESCO BLAMES LANGUAGE MIX-UP DURING SAUSAGE THEFT INTERVIEW

Belfast Telegraph, 22 July 2018.

Students get first hand job experience

Pratt (Kansas) Tribune, 28 Oct 2018.

PRESIDENT EISENHOWER'S GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER SAYS VEGAN DIETS COULD ATTRACT EXTRA-TERRESTRIALS

Fox News, —April 2016.

Police arrest man 'with gun, marijuana and box of squirrels'

Metro, 21 May 2016.

MONARCH GETS APPROVAL TO STAY IN THE AIR

Western Daily Press, 13 Oct 2016.



SIDELINES...

STATUE TAKES REVENGE

A 65-year-old man who tried to topple an anti-fascist monument in Split, Croatia, on 7 November was rewarded with a broken leg when the bust's plinth fell on him. It was a bust of Rade Koncar, a leader of the resistance to Croatia's pro-Nazi Ustase regime during WWII, who was executed at the age of 31. *Guardian*, 9 Nov 2018.

RED FACE DAY

A £1.25 stamp to mark the 75th anniversary of D-Day, captioned "Allied soldiers and medics waded ashore", was due to be issued next June. The photograph, however, showed US troops landing in what was Dutch New Guinea, 8,500 miles (13,680km) from the Normandy beaches. The stamp was withdrawn. *D.Telegraph*, 29 Dec 2018.

HAIL THE DONALD

A blind amphibian that buries its head below ground level has been named after Donald Trump. Construction firm Enviroworld paid £20,000 to call it *Demorphis donaldtrumpi*, based on the US President's view of climate change. *Metro*, 20 Dec 2018.

ELF COMMISSIONER

Melanie Rüter was employed by the State Road Construction Authority in Hanover as an 'elf commissioner' to placate nature spirits and elementals on the A2 autobahn between Lehrte and Brunswick, which had seen 3,500 accidents in 2017, including 10 fatalities. Ms Rüter felt "very sad energies" emanating from angry elves and trolls who wanted to reclaim their piece of nature, and were rebelling against humans by causing traffic accidents. *Hannoversche Allgemeine*, 4 Aug 2018.



MARTIN ROSS

DOGGED DEVOTION | More tales of caring canines and mutts in mourning



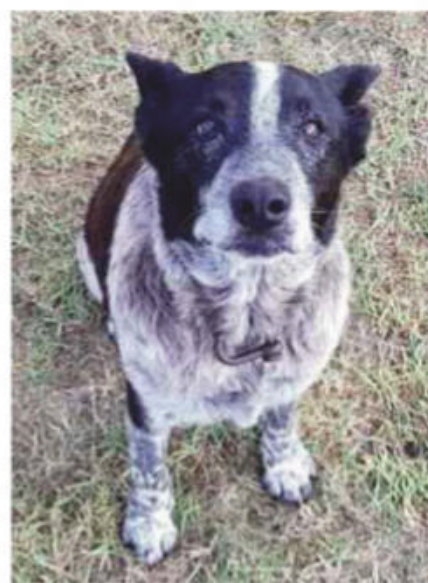
ABOVE: The dog alleged to have spent 80 days mourning its owner on a busy road. BELOW: Max, the 17-year-old deaf and partially blind dog who saved a lost toddler.

- An old blind dog spent 16 hours with a toddler lost in Queensland bush. Three-year-old Aurora Kyle, dressed in just a T-shirt, wandered off her grandmother's remote rural property at Cherry Gully near Warwick at around 3pm on 20 April 2018. As a frantic search started, involving about 100 police and residents, the family's cattle dog Max – who is 17, deaf and partially blind – stuck by the little girl's side, keeping her warm and safe overnight as temperatures dipped to 15C (59F) and rain fell. She was found by her grandmother, Leisa Marie Bennett, about 2km (1.2 miles) from where she had gone missing. Mrs Bennett heard the girl call out faintly at about 7.30am. "I shot up the mountain and when I came to the top, the dog came to me and led me straight to her," she said. Relatives said Aurora had taken shelter with the dog under a rock. She suffered only minor grazes and bruises from the terrain and appeared unfazed by her experience. The authorities named Max an honorary police dog. *Melbourne Herald Sun online*, 22 April; *BBC News*, 23 April; *D.Mirror*; *D.Telegraph*, 24 April 2018.

- A 55-year-old woman broke her leg after falling several metres down a sandy embankment at Gleasons Landing on the Yorke Peninsula in Southern Australia. Her dog, a

red heeler named Abby, ran to a campsite several hundred yards away, alerted her husband, and led him back to the cliff face where his wife lay injured. She was flown to hospital. *Adelaide Advertiser*, 28 Mar 2017.

- An eight-year-old border collie called Bonnie saved her elderly owner last May. She ran to get help when Val Smith, 75, found herself tangled in thick brambles after getting lost on a walk. Bonnie found two schoolteachers out walking, who sensed that something was wrong. Bonnie led them 500 yards down winding paths to the trapped great grandmother in the Widey Woods beauty spot in Plymouth. They found her in a panic with her other dog Snoopy circling in distress, but managed to free her. They took her home to her house in nearby



Egguckland and made her a nice cup of tea. *Sun*, 15 May 2018.

- A few years ago, an old lady from Busan, South Korea, adopted a little stray dog that she named Fu Shi. The two lived happily for a while, but in 2014 the old lady suffered a brain haemorrhage, which eventually led to dementia. She was taken to a nursing home, and Fu Shi spent the next three years awaiting her return. Every day he waited at the corner of the alley to her house. He would sit there all day until nightfall, and would then retreat back into the now abandoned house that they had shared. Neighbours left out food for him. After ample media coverage in South Korea and neighbouring countries, Fu Shi was adopted by a loving family and was given a new name, Sky. *oddiycentral.com*, 8 June 2017.

- A loyal dog waited in a busy road in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, braving the traffic for more than 80 days after its owner died there on 21 August 2018 (cause of death not stated). Three days after heartbreaking video footage of the dog was filmed and uploaded on 10 November, it had been viewed almost 1.5 million times on the Chinese microblogging site Sina Weibo. The dog was seen sitting and walking on the side of the road, "standing guard" as it mourned its owner. Drivers often left food for the dog, but it ran away when they tried to approach it. *Evening Standard*, 13 Nov 2018.

- Madison, a male Anatolian shepherd dog, somehow survived the wildfire that tore through Paradise, California, on 8 November, destroying most of the town. A video shows Madison, guarding the remains of the property, being reunited with 75-year-old Andrea Gaylord on 5 December – the first day she was permitted to return to her land. *Huffington Post*, 9 Dec; *Metro*, 10 Dec 2018.

For recent round-ups of devoted dogs, see FT353:8-9, 356:34.



SHITTING BRICKS | Cube-shaped wombat poo could yield benefits for manufacturing



ABOVE: A wombat can produce up to 100 turds a day! BELOW: A fine specimen of the wombat's unique cube-shaped poop.

Wombats produce cube-shaped turds – a talent broadly acknowledged as unique in the natural world. They mark their territory with piles of poo, the larger the better. In this way they boost the odds that their droppings, deposited near burrow entrances, prominent rocks, raised ground and logs, will not roll away. The piles could function to communicate with and attract other wombats. The muscular marsupials can squeeze out up to 100 turds a night. This gives a whole new spin to that hoary old phrase, “to shit a brick”.

To investigate the mystery, Patricia Yang, a postdoctoral fellow in mechanical engineering at Georgia Institute of Technology in Atlanta, and her colleagues studied the digestive tracts of common wombats that had been euthanised after being struck by cars and trucks on Tasmanian roads. Close inspection revealed that the marsupial excrement changed from liquid to solid in the last 25 per cent of the intestines – but then in the final eight per cent a varied elasticity of the walls meant the poop takes shape as separated cubes. By emptying the intestines and inflating them with long modelling balloons of the sort used to make balloon animals at children's parties, the researchers measured how the tissue stretched in different places.

In work to be presented at the annual meeting

of the American Physical Society's fluid dynamics division in Georgia, the team explain how the last section of the wombat intestine does not stretch evenly, unlike the rest of the intestine. When measured around the circumference, some parts give more than others. This allows the intestine to deform in such a way that packs faeces into 2cm (0.8in)-wide cubes rather than the usual sausage shapes.

To produce square turds, the circumference of the intestine would need four stretchy regions interspersed with four stiff regions. That way, the stiff regions form the flat faces, while the stretchier parts allow corners to form. The balloon tests revealed only three stretchy parts and two stiffer ones. In an upcoming paper, the

scientists suggest that the other stiff and stretchy bits may only become apparent when they can inflate the intestines to a larger size. In other words, strain a little harder.

Yang believes that the revelation will have practical implications. At present, engineers have only two methods for making cubes: either moulding them or cutting them. Wombats suggest a third route is possible. “It would be a cool method to apply to the manufacturing process,” she said. “How to make a cube with soft tissue instead of just moulding it.” *theguardian.com*, 18 Nov; *BBC News*, 19 Nov 2018.



SIDELINES...

LEGGY KITTY

A kitten born with six legs is the first recorded case in the UK. Tabby Henrietta, from Wallsend, Tyne & Wear, had polymelia and was awaiting an operation to remove the extra limbs, which were growing below the “knees” of its hind legs. *D.Mirror*, 3 Aug 2018.

ANGEL MUSEUM CLOSES

Joyce Berg, who launched the Angel Museum in Wisconsin 20 years ago with her personal collection of figurines, is closing it down due to lack of funds. She started collecting in 1976 and holds the record for the most angels, at 13,165. *<i> 27 Sept 2018.*

DEER DETERRANT

On the advice of a Dutch railway company, the coastal town of Zandvoort, west of Amsterdam, plans to release the odour of lion dung through diffusers to deter deer from nearby dunes that regularly invade gardens. *Courrier Picard (Amiens)*, 19 Aug 2018.

AUSTRIAN BOUNDER

On 1-2 September, a kangaroo was spotted by several residents in the forest and meadows near the small town of Kirchschlag in the Hellmonsoed district of northern Austria. All nearby zoos and kangaroo breeders denied having lost any marsupials. Kangaroos in Austria require a permit to be kept as pets. *BBC News*, 4 Sept; *New Scientist*, 15 Sept 2018.

SHOWN THE DOOR

An Italian priest – who considers Pope Francis an “antipope” and claims to have supernatural communications with angels, saints and the Madonna – has been excommunicated. Fr Alessandro Minutella was spreading “heresy and schism”, according to the archdiocese of Monreale in Sicily. *<i> 15 Nov 2018.*

SPOOKY TELLY

Several people have reported that their ‘smart’ TVs regularly ‘wake up’ in the middle of the night. Then Martin Irving of Teesdale, Co. Durham, wrote in to say: “Since our beloved dog Molly died in October 2014, the television in ‘her’ room automatically switches itself on each year on October 13. Is this a message from the dog spirit world?” *D.Telegraph*, 18+19+20 Oct 2018.



SIDELINES...

NUMBER 11 FIXATION

Dominic Salway, 35, has arithmomania – a number-linked condition similar to OCD. Sufferers have a strong need to count their actions or objects around them. Salway is obsessed with the number 11, so when he saw the number in Stoke-on-Trent on the registration of a Ford Fiesta left with the keys in the ignition, he had to drive it off. He escaped with a suspended sentence. *D.Star, 20 Sept 2018.*

SERPENT ABUSE

Two men from Rajasthan have been getting cobras to bite them on their tongues as no amount of alcohol or opioids gave them a buzz anymore. They were being examined by toxin specialists in Chandigarh to determine if they had consumed drugs to the point of immunity or are genuine medical curiosities. A cobra bite can kill a full-size bull. *D.Telegraph, 15 Sept 2018.*

NOT HIS DAY

An Austrian man who lost his wallet was unlucky enough for police to find it – and the counterfeit 50-euro notes it contained. The 22-year-old's ID card led to his arrest. He had bought the notes online from Poland in order to buy drugs. (*Sydney*) *D.Telegraph, 29 Sept 2018.*

KILLER PUFFER

A couple from Gloucestershire, walking their dog on Hayle beach in Cornwall, discovered a puffer fish in a rock pool. "Apparently, they are deadly if touched," said Julian Buckland. "Fortunately, my wife didn't try to put it back in the sea." Puffer fish, usually found in tropical waters, contain tetrodotoxin, for which there is no antidote. *D.Mirror, 3 Oct 2018.*

SPOILER ALERT

Sergey Savitsky, 55, a researcher at Russia's Antarctic station, stabbed his colleague Oleg Beloguzov, 52, because he was "fed up with the man telling him the endings of books". The men were avid readers to pass the lonely hours spent at the outpost. The victim, with a knife injury to his heart, was flown from the Belling-shausen research station on King George Island to Chile and put in intensive care. *irishtimes.com, 31 Oct 2018*

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

The latest updates on previous FT news items



ABOVE: Argentinian rancher Norberto Bieri found seven of his cows mutilated, saying that "everything appears cut with a laser".

POOR COW [FT38:5-15, 68:23-29]



Cattle mutilation (long covered by FT) is back. An Argentinean rancher, Norberto Bieri, found seven of his cows mutilated. All had been pregnant. Bieri, of Colonia Durán village, Santa Fe province, described how the tongues and genitals of each animal had been removed with "precise cuts", adding: "Veterinarians have come from the place and no one can tell me how or with what they could do something like this... They say there is no scientific explanation. Everything appears cut with a laser, they didn't leave any traces of blood, and also pieces of the animals were missing." Tests failed to find evidence of poisoning or electric shock. Bieri stated that scavengers and insects had refused to touch the carcasses, and some residents also claimed to have seen "strange lights from the sky that are not stars." Bieri confirmed this, telling journalists that he had witnessed anomalous aerial phenomena in the past, coinciding with other mutilation episodes in the area. "The thing

about the lights is true," he said. "I've seen it."

Since Argentina is a major beef producer, reports of livestock mutilations are not uncommon (see **FT163:24-25, 295:28**). Another cattle rancher, Julio Zurbirgk, from Puerto General San Martín, a city in the same province, told reporters that mutilations have been happening in Argentina for the past 20 years. Last year, one of his Aberdeen Angus cows, also pregnant, was found dead. True to form, its eyes, tongue, jaw and anus had been removed "with surgical precision".

Although some locals fear the legendary chupacabras (**FT85:9, 89:34-38, 140:22-23, 257:48-53, 271:30-35**) may be responsible, Zurbirgk blames extraterrestrials: "They must remove the organs aboard the spacecraft, because there was nothing strange to be found around the animal. One can also see that they must throw the animals from their craft, because they land with their legs backward [?]."

Also in 2018, Colorado farmer Thomas Walker, of Custer County, was mystified to find a pig, two goats, and a pregnant mare had all died over successive days. There were no scratch marks or injuries to his

animals, except to the mare, which had had its anus neatly removed. The foetus was also missing. Walker called in UFO investigator Chuck Zukowski, who claims that animal mutilation and other mysterious incidents tend, like Walker's farm, to be clustered along the 37th parallel (37 degrees north latitude), dubbed "The paranormal superhighway". However, the Colorado state vet has said that anaplasmosis and bloat were responsible for several recent cattle deaths, and suggested that coyotes and other scavengers could be responsible for the missing body parts. *mysteriousuniverse.org, 3 Oct 2017, 10 Aug 2018; inexplicata.blogspot.com, 9 Aug 2018; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdP7wFvLvD4*

PELTING PERSECUTION [FT357:21]



Last October, the Dzuda family home and other buildings in the Garikai suburb of Bindura in Zimbabwe had been plagued for over a month by falling rubble, quarry stones and even donkey dung coming from all directions, but no one could determine who was



chucking the stuff. Members of an apostolic sect failed to put an end to the trouble through exorcism. The missiles only hit buildings, never people. Neighbours were afraid to share their experiences because it was believed that anyone who expressed disgruntlement laid themselves open to attack by the mysterious forces. A crew from *ZBC News* tried in vain to catch a glimpse of the stone shower, but filmed a large quantity of pebbles, rubble and bricks on the roof of the Dzuda home. *bulawayo24.jungonet.com*, 17 Oct 2018

PURLOINED PENIS PANIC [FT366:09]



Last September, a video appeared online showing a man in Nigeria escaping from an angry crowd. The caption read: “A security guard’s manhood disappeared, immediately the man (politician) in the jeep gave him money, today at City Hall, Lagos. While people gathered and tried stopping the man, he got away with a barrage of shooting from the car.” In the video, the driver of the vehicle is seen driving off while several people present at the scene try to stop him. The Twitter user also shared another experience. He wrote: “Our gateman’s manhood disappeared in 2006 or 2007 but he was lucky to catch the man. The guy was arrested and after plenty beating, he returned the manhood. They had to pay someone so he can test the efficiency of the manhood right there in the police station.” *naij.com (Nigeria)*, 20 Sept 2018.

THE HAMPSTEAD WITCH HUNT [FT327:26-27, 361:24]



Sabine McNeill, 74, from Camden in north London, described as one of Britain’s worst online trolls, was jailed for nine years on 10 January. Judge Sally Cahill QC told the weeping pensioner: “This case has to be one of the most serious cases of stalking and breach of a



ABOVE: Sabine MacNeill, described as “arrogant, malicious, evil and manipulative”.

restraining order that there can be. The direct consequence of your actions is that for the four families concerned you have ruined all normal family life. The allegations were of murder, cannibalism, satanism and sexual abuse... In my judgment, you are an arrogant, malicious, evil and manipulative woman.”

McNeill had orchestrated claims that Christchurch (Primary) School in Hampstead was at the centre of a cult, numbering more than 100 people, which cooked babies (in a Finchley Road McDonalds) and ate them. The campaign forced innocent children to change their names, carry tracking devices and practise panic drills. Ella Draper, the original source of this vile farrago of nonsense, and her lover, Abraham Christie, had evaded arrest in February 2015. Draper is thought to be holed up in Spain; no word on Christie’s whereabouts. One of Draper’s fans, Rupert Wilson Quantance, was jailed for nine months in August 2017 for harassing parents outside the school. *dailymail.co.uk*, 10 Jan; *D.Telegraph*, 11 Jan 2019.

DANGEROUS CUPPA [FT362:7]



On Thursday, 2 November 2017, three Jehovah’s Witnesses – along with two teenage daughters of one of them – gathered at a house in Nisku, Alberta, where they spent the next three days locked

inside, believing they were in danger from wicked people or demons. They thought the Great Tribulation had come, a sort of Rapture before the End of Days, expected on 6 November. On that day, the family fled the house naked (no time to get dressed) and drove an SUV to their neighbours’ home, which they broke into while chanting “Jehovah”. Their neighbours – a man, his daughter and his six-week-old grandson – were forced into the SUV while being ordered to join in the chanting. The man was stuffed in the boot (trunk), but managed to escape and was picked up by a passing truck. In the mayhem, the SUV rammed the truck and careened into a ditch. That’s when the Mounties arrived to make arrests.

This December, a judge in Edmonton accepted a joint submission of a one-year sentence for the three kidnappers, to be served in the community, followed by two years of parole. The strange episode was described by psychologists as a “brief psychotic disorder” caused by “pseudo-scientific medicine” and deep religious beliefs. The original reports spoke of a tea brought back from India as the supposed “medicine”; the Gang of Fort speculated it was datura. However, court documents stated that alcohol and drugs were *not* factors in the case. Neighbours told police the group seemed “demonised” and “obviously not in their right minds”. *D.Mirror online*, 26 Sept; *Toronto Star*, 21 Dec 2018.

SIDELINES...

SEEKING INDEPENDENCE

Steve Ogier, 46, has taken his fight to build a two-bedroom home in Castel, a protected area of Guernsey, to the United Nations by declaring his land the independent micro-nation of Everland, with him as king. He has made his daughter Evelyn, eight, a princess. *Times*, 24 Oct 2018.

BAT GUARDIANS

For more than a century, bats have been welcome guests at two ancient libraries in Portugal – the Joanina Library at the University of Coimbra and the Library at the National Palace of Mafra – because they eat flies and gnats that would otherwise damage incunabula and manuscripts. Every morning, librarians clean bat scat from the floors and tables. *Smithsonian Magazine*, 7 June 2018.

MARIACHEAT

A mariachi singer hired by a man in Mexico City to croon to his lover beneath her balcony was furious to find the woman was his own wife. The music ended as the pair traded blows. The man had planned to propose to the cheating woman after the rendition of “If They Let Us”. *D.Mirror*, 21 Sept 2018.

FAMILY SPAT

Douglas Ferguson, 76, of Bristol, Tennessee, tried to attack his son with a chainsaw on 28 June, while his son was mowing the lawn. In an attempt to defend himself, the son ran over Ferguson with the lawnmower. The father, who had to have his leg amputated, was eventually charged with attempted second degree murder. *wvtv*, 11 Oct; *Knoxville (TN) News Sentinel*, 14 Oct 2018.



MARTIN ROSS



STRANGE DAYS

SIDELINES...

BOVINE ASSAULT

A man was hospitalised on 5 August after trying to stop about two dozen “possessed” cows attacking jogger Aimee Wedgwood in a park in Auckland, New Zealand. He was trampled and lost chunks of flesh. “[The cows] were following me with their eyes,” said Wedgwood. “I was on my third loop of the park. I’d passed them twice before. I backed off the path, then they all came around me from all directions.” (*Queensland Courier-Mail*, 7 Aug 2018.

GOURMET RODENTS

Sophisticated London rats are snubbing traditional poison baits for Green & Black’s 80 per cent cacao chocolate and other fancy titbits. According to pest controllers, they are particularly partial to manuka honey, organic peanut butter and gluten-free ice cream. *Sun*, 30 Sept 2018.

PERILOUS PIPS

An unemployed Somerset man, 32, who drank up to 20 pints of scrumpy a day, went almost blind – not from alcohol but from apple pips. Some rough cider makers leave the pips in, and these can be broken down into a form of cyanide. *Western Daily Press*, 28 Aug 2018.

HITLER VERSUS LENNIN

Campaign slogans reading “Hitler returns” and “Hitler with the people” appeared around Yungar, a farming town in Peru’s central Andes, where local politician Hitler Alba Sanchez sought a new term as mayor on 7 October. “I’m the good Hitler,” he said. This year, his campaign came under attack by Lennin Vladimir Rodriguez Valverde, who tried in vain to have Hitler’s name struck off the ballot. [*R*] 21 Sept 2018.



MARTIN ROSS



PHOTOS: DINESH GUPTA / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

CAMEL COIFFURE

Japanese hairdresser Megumi Takeichi cuts patterns into the hair of a camel ahead of the 2019 Bikaner Camel Festival in the western Indian state of Rajasthan. This colourful celebration of the

‘ship of the desert’ takes place every January and sees decorated camels parading and taking part in various competitions, including camel dancing, camel milking and best decorated camel. *Times of India*, 10 Jan 2019.

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Auroral sounds

DAVID HAMBLING asks whether new research might transform traditional belief into scientific fact

For centuries, witnesses have described strange sounds in the sky associated with the aurora borealis: swishing, popping and crackling noises which known science could not explain. Similar sounds have been reported when meteor fireballs and even the Space Shuttle cross the sky. The reality of these sounds was long a matter of debate. In 2019, we might finally start to understand the mechanism that creates them.

One of the earliest, if somewhat garbled, accounts comes from the Roman historian Tacitus. In his *Germania*, written in the first century AD, Tacitus says that in the far north “the forms of horses and rays from a head” can be seen in the sky, and “it is believed too that a sound is heard.”

Indigenous peoples have long traditions of hearing auroral sounds. The native people of Canada described the sound of the Northern Lights, although European explorers in Arctic regions listened for them in vain. Inuit in Alaska told American geographer Hudson Struck that it was only “foolish white men” who could not hear the aurora. Finnish geophysicist Karl Selim Lemström carried out extensive research on the aurora in the 1880s. He never heard any sound himself, but talked to many Laplanders who insisted that it made a rumbling sound.

According to Siberian tradition, the noise of the aurora came from the skull of a walrus being used as the ball in a game played by spirits.

This is not necessarily a case of scientists foolishly ignoring centuries of local observation, as traditions may be wildly inaccurate. Inuit in Point Barrow, Alaska, carried knives to protect themselves from the aurora, which they said could come down and cut off your head. The Sami people in Scandinavia tended to stay indoors during an aurora, for fear it would beat them to death. Others said that if you whistled, the aurora would descend and carry you away. All of which would make a great horror movie, and bears interesting comparisons with reports of alien encounters, but tends to undermine other traditional knowledge.

In time some Europeans, both settlers and fishermen, also reported hearing auroral sounds. “Like the sound made when a couple of slices of good fat bacon are dropped in a red-hot pan,” according to one.



LEFT: The Northern Lights visible (and audible?) in the skies above Norway.

sound. Things like dry leaves or pine needles might act as radio receivers, converting radio waves into audible sound. Keay called this effect Geophysical Electrophonics. His laboratory demonstrations showed that an observer’s hair, or the frame of their glasses, might produce a hissing sound in response to radio waves. This theory gained little traction, partly because it would require radio emissions much stronger than

those actually observed.

More recently, Finnish scientist Unto Laine has made significant strides towards proving that auroral sounds exist and discovering how they are created. Laine first heard the sounds himself when he was a specialist in speech acoustics and psychoacoustics (how humans perceive sound). He started a research project with the Sodankylä Geophysical Observatory, a leading centre for auroral science.

Recording auroral sound is challenging because it is so faint. Most aurora watchers never hear the sound, even if it is present, because of background noise. It took long nights of waiting in suitably remote, quiet locations for Laine to capture the first sound recordings of the Northern Lights. Equally importantly, he needed to show the sounds were associated with the aurora, which he achieved by recording electromagnetic activity at the time of the sounds and showing the correlation mathematically.

Laine’s work indicates that the sounds are not electrophonic as previously thought. Instead, they come from the air itself. They only occur on still evenings, when an inversion layer of warm air lies over cool air at ground level. Laine believes that positive and negative ions build up on the faces of the inversion layer, and that the aurora triggers corona discharge, a type of electrical discharge sometimes seen and heard around high-voltage equipment.

Now Laine has funding for an automated listening station at the Hankasalmi observatory, which will be operational in 2019. This should provide a steady stream of data, which will be automatically analysed by new software under development.

Laine’s theory remains unproven; but the science is sound, and the way has been paved for auroral sounds to move from fanciful folklore to established phenomenon.

“The noise of swishing similar to a lash of a whip being drawn through the air,” said another. “A swishing or rustle, like that of a silken skirt moving back and forth... very low, but plainly discernible,” said a third.

The vast majority reported no sound, including careful observers like Selim Lemström, who saw the Northern Lights for themselves. Anecdotal reports of sounds had to be weighed against known science that suggested they were mistaken. The lower margin of the aurora is typically at an altitude of about 100km (60 miles), in near space where there is effectively no atmosphere and even the loudest sound does not carry. Witnesses insisted that the sounds changed in time with the movement of the aurora; at that distance there would be a delay of several minutes.

One proposed explanation was that the apparent sounds were a type of auditory hallucination triggered by a visual stimulus. This type of effect is well known to psychologists. In 2017, neuroscientist Lisa DeBruine of the University of Glasgow started an Internet meme, a silent animation of a bouncing electricity pylon that causes many viewers to hear a thud every time the pylon landed. This is described as a “cross-modality cognitive effect”, or sensory crossover. Your brain anticipates a certain sound when it sees something heavy hitting the ground, so you actually hear it. The movement of the aurora has often been described as resembling moving curtains or cloth, so perhaps the brain generates appropriate sounds effects to accompany it.

Some scientists persisted in trying to find a physical explanation. In 1980, Dr Colin Keay of the University of Newcastle in New South Wales showed that VHF radio waves from atmospheric phenomena such as aurora or meteors could stimulate objects on the ground into producing

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PAUL DEVEREUX, Managing Editor of *Time & Mind*, digs up the latest archaeological discoveries

GIVING THE FINGER

For a long time now, archaeologists studying Upper Palaeolithic cave paintings have encountered a lot of painted/stencilled images of handprints with missing fingers – some with two or more missing digits. They are a mystery, and varied assumptions had been made, among them suggestions that the missing fingers were due to frostbite or accidents. But the numbers are against those kind of happenstance explanations. For instance, in Grotte de Vache, in France, 114 out of 231 hand images have missing fingers. In another cave in France, the average is even higher, 28 out of 49. Another idea that has been floated is that the missing fingers may have been due to some sort of genetic disorder, but the occurrence of such handprints is too widespread to support it.

Now a fresh theory has been offered by researchers at Simon Fraser University in Canada. In conducting anthropological research, they found that 121 groups of people living on different continents have engaged in finger amputation rituals. Such rituals could take many forms, some as part of a religious ceremony, or as a way to mourn the loss of a loved one, or even as some extreme punishment/initiation ritual. The researchers stress that there is no way yet to prove that such rituals occurred in the Upper Palaeolithic, but they reckon that there is enough evidence to warrant further investigation. *PhysORG*, 4 Dec 2018.

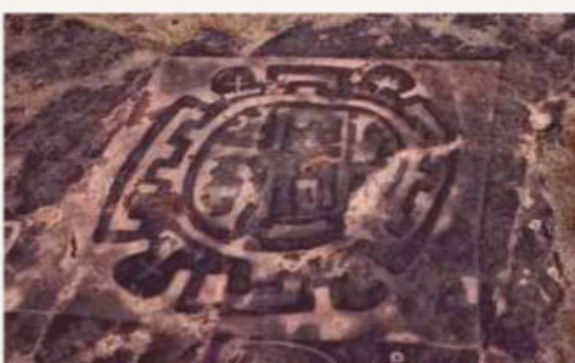
LOST CIVILISATION

It is periodically commented upon in this column how in the 'Lost and Found' department of prehistory some pretty large-scale items are uncovered – like whole civilisations. Here is another one such: archaeologists think that newly discovered rock carvings in the Konkan region of Maharashtra, India, are indications of a previously unknown people. Etched on flat rocky hilltops, they were barely noticed for millennia, being hidden beneath layers of soil and mud, though a few were already known and considered holy by locals. The carvings, and there are thousands of them, depict images of a remarkable variety of animals, birds, human figures, and geometrical designs. They are estimated to be about 12,000 years old.

After finding a few of these petroglyphs, Sudhir Risbood and Manoj Marathe led a small group to investigate them further. They found more in village temples, and in and around over 50 villages, of which only five were aware that the carvings existed. "We walked thousands of kilometres," Risbood reported. "People started sending photographs to us and we even enlisted schools in our efforts to find them. We



ABOVE: Some Upper Palaeolithic handprint images, like these examples in Cosquer cave in southern France, seem to have missing fingers – but why? BELOW: Aerial view of the Maharashtra rock carvings.



made students ask their grandparents and other village elders if they knew about any other engravings." The investigators went on to document the petroglyphs and lobby authorities to study and preserve them.

The director of the Maharashtra state archaeology department reckons that the images appear to have been created by a hunter-gatherer rather than an agricultural community. Among more familiar creatures, there are images of animals like hippos and rhinoceroses that are not now found in this part of India, as well as sea life such as sharks and whales – and amphibians like turtles. *BBC News*, 1 Oct 2018.

YET MORE LOST AND FOUND

While we are talking about lost items from prehistory, here is a very unexpected one: a previously unrecorded Neolithic recumbent stone circle in Scotland. (Recumbent stone circles are those which have a massive, altar-like horizontal megalith, the recumbent, flanked at either end by an upright standing stone, all integrated into a ring of stones; about a hundred of them cluster in Aberdeenshire. Many seem to be oriented toward extreme points in the lunar cycle.) The 'new' one is on a farm near Alford, Aberdeenshire. Although a complete stone

circle, and known and respected by those who have farmed the area over the years, it remained unknown to archaeologists until now. The site was reported to Aberdeenshire Council's Archaeology Service by Fiona Bain, whose family have farmed in the area for generations. "In numbering 10 stones it fits the average, but its diameter is about 3m [10ft] smaller than any known hitherto and it is unusual in that all the stones are proportionately small," informs Neil Ackerman, Historic Environment Record Assistant at Aberdeenshire Council. "It is orientated SSW and enjoys a fine outlook in that direction, while the rich lichen cover on the stones is indicative of the ring's antiquity." *Evening Express*, 14 Dec; *Scotsman*, 17 Dec 2018.

AT HEART, WE ARE ARTISTS

A cave painting at least 40,000 years old has been discovered in Borneo. A technique known as 'uranium series analysis' was used to date calcites that had formed on the image over time since it was painted. Showing a patchy depiction of an animal, probably a species of wild cattle still present in Borneo, it seems the rock painting is the oldest known example of figurative art in the world. The other contenders are the fabulous charcoal drawings of animals in the Chauvet Cave, France, which are dated to c.35,000 years ago. "It now seems that two early cave art provinces arose at a similar time in remote corners of Palaeolithic Eurasia," observed one of the Borneo site's investigators, Dr Adam Brumm, a co-author of a study published in *Nature*. Science shows that, ironically, it is art that marks human societies from their earliest origins. *The Week*, 17 Nov 2018.



NOT SO OLD? | An amateur gerontologist from Moscow has cast doubt on the claim of Jeanne Calment to be the oldest person who ever lived – but is this Russian fake news?

GEORGES GOBET / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

When Jeanne Calment died in 1997 at the supposed age of 122 years and 164 days, the Frenchwoman was hailed as the oldest person who ever lived – at least, the oldest with unimpeachable documentation. “I know that I will die laughing,” she told friends. “Have fun if you want to live a long time” [FT78:41]. She once quipped: “I have only one wrinkle, and I’m sitting on it.” She took up fencing aged 85 and was still riding a bicycle at 100. Until the age of 120, she smoked one or two cigarettes a day [FT103:6]. She claimed to recall, as a child, selling coloured pencils to van Gogh and watching the Eiffel Tower being built.

André-Francois Raffay, a solicitor, bought Calment’s flat in Arles in 1965, agreeing under the *en viager* system to pay her a fixed sum of 2,500 francs (about £350) a month until her death, whereupon he would become the owner. However, Raffay died in 1995, aged 77, by which time he had paid out around 900,000 francs, at least three times the value of the flat. On her birthday every year, she sent him a card with the mischievous phrase: “Sorry I’m still alive”. Raffay’s widow was obliged to keep sending the monthly cheque until Calment’s death [FT89:15].

Last November, Nikolay Zak, 35, a glass blower at Moscow State University and an amateur gerontologist trained in mathematics, cast doubt on Calment’s longevity at a meeting of gerontologists in Moscow, claiming that “Madame Calment” was actually Jeanne’s daughter Yvonne, who assumed her mother’s identity when the latter died, to avoid paying crippling inheritance tax. This sceptical hypothesis had been promulgated by Valery Novoselov, assistant professor of the Department of Gerontology and Geriatrics of RUDN University in Moscow. The supposed deception began in 1934, the year Yvonne’s death from pneumonia at the age of 36 was registered. Zak claims



“Yvonne had a motive to acquire the identity of her mother”

it was in fact Jeanne who died that year, aged almost 59, and suggests that Yvonne, her only daughter, started pretending to be her, and fooled the world for the next six decades, despite being 23 years younger than her mother. Zak argues that “according to numerous testimonies”, the person the outside world accepted as Jeanne “looked 20 to 30 years younger than her age, at least from 100 to 117 years.”

Photographs of Yvonne taken before her supposed death allegedly show that she had the same ears and nose as the woman who became famous as Jeanne Calment. Jeanne, born in 1875, and Fernand her husband, were joint owners of a department store in Arles, Provence. Zak says that because the family “had a large influence” in Arles, “there could be several ways for them to manage the identity switch”. He continues: “Yvonne could spend a lot of time outside of Arles where she could be known under the pseudonym Jeanne. Yvonne had a strong motive to acquire the identity of her mother in case of her death – the inheritance tax on large assets was as high as 35 per cent in the Thirties, and in

1931, the father of Jeanne and the mother of her husband had died. Further inheritance taxes could have driven the family to the brink of ruin... Forensic analysis of the bodies and DNA of family members could be done to establish the truth.” That an identity switch went unremarked among the Calment family’s neighbours in Arles stretches credulity.

“Yvonne’s husband Joseph Charles Frédéric Billot never got remarried, despite the fact that he was only 42 at the moment of her ‘death’”, said Valery Novoselov. “There were many mentions that he was getting along very well with Jeanne and they were raising Yvonne’s son Frédéric Jean Paul together. You would expect a husband to treat his own wife well, wouldn’t you? The kid, by the way, was calling Jeanne ‘mamzanne’, that is, Mom Jeanne... Next, Jeanne used to mention the maid that took her to school. Nikolay [Zak] has found the date of birth of this maid, Marthe Fousson... in the census of 1911, and it turns out that she was 10 years younger than Jeanne, which means that she could only be taking her daughter Yvonne to school.”

There’s a provocative passage in *L’assurance et ses secrets* (Insurance And Its Secrets) by Jean-Pierre Daniel, published in 2007 – which, being translated, states: “Everyone remembers Jeanne Calment, who has officially died at age 122 on August 4, 1997. It was said at the time that this lady had benefited from having a life annuity, which was true. This was paid by a large French company that was not happy at all with this exceptional longevity. The company was even more upset as it knew that it had been paying not Jeanne Calment, but her daughter. In reality, after the death of the real Jeanne Calment, her daughter who obviously was no longer a child, had taken her mother’s identity to keep receiving the annuity. The insurance company had discovered identity theft, but in agreement with... the

public authorities, it had not wished to reveal the truth, given how much the character of the ‘grandmother of the French’ had become legendary.”

The *Washington Post* interviewed nine scientists with expertise in the world of gerontology, statistics and demography, including Robert Young, director of the Gerontology Research Group and consultant to Guinness *World Records*. All but one of the eight who had examined Zak’s research said that they found it lacking if not outright deficient. The two French gerontologists involved in Calment’s verification – Jean-Marie Robine and Michel Allard – also questioned it. “All of this is incredibly shaky and rests on nothing,” Robine told *Le Parisien*, saying Zak’s claims were “defamatory”.

Russia doesn’t have a good reputation in the world of longevity research, where frauds are not uncommon (remember all those ancient Georgians lauded by Stalin?) and the need for reliable documentation is high. Russia has been largely shut out of the international community of gerontologists that track the super old, and the accusation of fraud in the Calment case could be yet another example of Russian disinformation. “This reminds me of ‘NASA stages the Moon landing’,” said Steve Austad, a gerontologist at the University of Alabama. “[P]eople are looking for tiny inconsistencies in evidence that probably have no meaning and then overlooking a vast amount of evidence that her identity is confirmed with more than 30 government documents.”

In the event that Madame Calment’s record is definitively discredited, her crown would be taken by Sarah Clark Knauss, who died on 30 December 1999 in Allentown, Pennsylvania, aged 119 years and 97 days [FT134:19]. *leafscience.org* (Life Extension Advocacy Foundation), 4 Dec 2018; *D.Mail*, 2 Jan; *Washington Post*, 12 Jan 2019.

SPECIAL REPORT

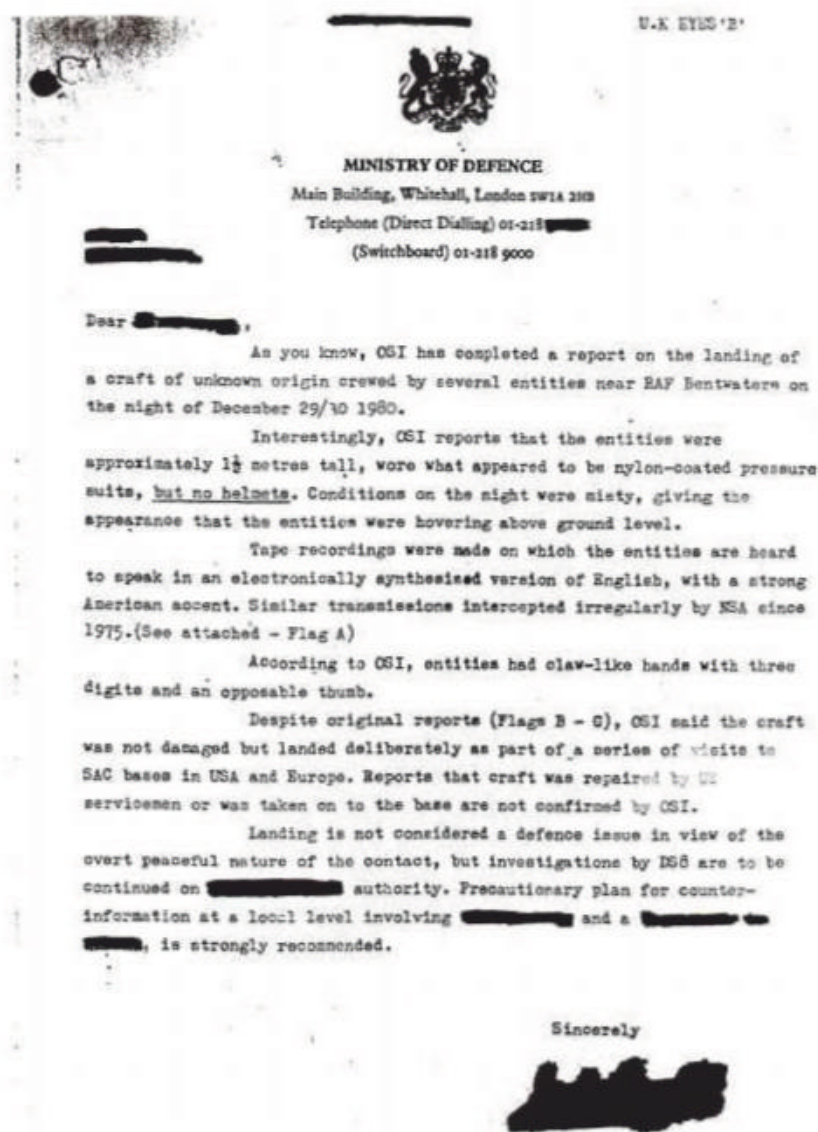
WHO DARES WINS: SAS RENDLESHAM PRANK?

DAVID CLARKE examines the latest twist in the Rendlesham Forest legend as an alleged British Special Forces soldier breaks cover to reveal 'the truth' about the famous UFO sightings.

Ever since the first rumours about a UFO 'landing' in Rendlesham forest near RAF Woodbridge in Suffolk (see FT204:32-39) leaked out in 1981, the story has been kept alive with a stream of new theories, claims, hoaxing and practical joking.

In 1984 ufologist Harry Harris was sent a fake Ministry of Defence letter that claimed to be an intelligence report of a UFO landing near the twin base complex. The UFO was crewed by several 'entities' with claw hands "with three digits and an opposable thumb".¹ The fake letter found its way into the MoD's Rendlesham file and the ministry found itself fending off requests to verify its authenticity. Then there was the story told by an ex-USAF security policeman who claimed he scared guards on the base perimeter using the lights on his patrol car to produce an eerie sight in the mist (see FT175:14). Perhaps the most bizarre story came from a local farmer who claimed the UFO that fooled the airmen was really a burning lorry packed with stolen fertiliser (*D.Mail*, 5 Sept 2009). In 2005 the abandoned hangars at Bentwaters were used as a location for a Channel 4 reality show, *Space Cadets*, where a group of unwitting contestants were duped into believing they were en route to outer space – but never left the ground.

Fake stories and inventive story-telling have always been part and parcel of the UFO mythology. New variants will continue to evolve as the UFO industry gears up for the 40th anniversary of the Rendlesham legend in 2020. A documentary based upon the claims of mercurial witness Larry Warren is due for release this year (see FT375:32). Meanwhile Sony



ABOVE: The 1984 hoax letter that found its way into the MoD's Rendlesham file. FACING PAGE: Col Ted Conrad, Base Commander at the time of the incident.

Pictures have announced that Hollywood actor Lawrence Fishburne will play a lead role in a 8-part TV drama *Rendlesham*, directed by Joe Ahearne (of *Doctor Who* fame), now in production.

But so far none of the many and varied attempts to reveal the 'true facts' about the events have mentioned the alleged involvement of the British Army's Special Air Service (motto: *Who Dares Wins*). Rumours about the presence of special forces in the forest at the time are nothing new. Back in 1992 Graham Birdsall in *Quest* magazine reported "on excellent authority" that

"They called us aliens! We'll show them what aliens look like!"

around the time of the incident "a group of heavily armed US personnel left their base at Woodbridge... and were later confronted by an armed British detachment". Birdsall's source claimed the British soldiers "demanded the Americans disarm as they had no legal right to handle firearms [on

British soil]... after a brief, but nerve-jangling few minutes, and after the American detachment had consulted via radio with their seniors, they withdrew to their base".²

A variant of this story was published by Georgina Bruni in her book on Rendlesham, *You Can't Tell The People*, in 2000. Maybe someone made a direct link with the UFO incident and used it to have some fun. Some time ago, a person who claims to be a SAS insider wrote to me after he saw me talking about Rendlesham on a TV documentary.³ I will call him Frank.⁴ He said it was "about time that the truth is revealed" about the incident.

I checked out his story by talking to trusted (and open) sources in the British military, including some high profile former SAS servicemen. Then I sat on it for three years, waiting to see if he would cast his fishing rod elsewhere. Now I call his bluff. True or false, I felt his story was worth telling.

Frank says that in 1980 the twin USAF bases at Bentwaters-Woodbridge housed tactical nuclear weapons. Responsibility for guarding these lay with the USAF 81st Security Police at Woodbridge. The sensitive nature of the facility led the authorities to conduct a series of 'exercises' to test the ability of the UK and US security forces to detect and intercept any attack by Soviet forces on the nuclear weapons store. All these simulated exercises were unannounced and carried out by UK Special Forces. According to Frank, in 1980 the USAF quietly enhanced and upgraded their ability to monitor the air above the base as well as ground targets.

During the summer, the SAS mounted a covert night exercise



to penetrate the Bentwaters SSA (Special Storage Area), parachuting into the forest from a C130 that had 'strayed' into the area from a training zone. But the plan was rumbled when the troopers' black parachutes were detected by the new base surveillance equipment; all were captured and interrogated by a young ARRS (Air Rescue & Recovery Squadron) lieutenant who was unaware of the ongoing security testing programme. The troopers identified themselves but were roughly treated by their captors for a period of 18 hours before release.

"The language used by the young US officer was unusual (to British ears) in that he repeatedly referred to the Brits as unidentified *aliens* who posed a threat in their presence on the sovereign US soil of the airbase," Frank continued.

"Although the word alien is commonly used in the US (for example by immigration officers to describe non-US citizens) it has gained a rather different usage in the UK. After their release, the troopers made no complaint at their rough treatment but determined to get their own back on the USAF for the beating that they had received. In particular, their repeated characterisation as 'aliens' sowed the seeds of a plan – *They called us aliens! Right, we'll show them what aliens really look like!*"

What happened next, according to Frank, would be routine for a specialist covert operations squad. The SAS and their naval equivalent the SBS (Special Boat Service) are trained to deceive and misinform whilst remaining invisible. During the autumn of 1980 nights were spent reconnoitring the perimeter of the twin base complex where it met the Forestry Commission plantation. As December approached, lights and coloured flares were rigged in the forest. Black helium balloons coupled to remote-controlled kites carried suspended materials into the sky, activated by radio-controls.



"A great deal of nocturnal Christmas fun was had at the expense of the USAF – and the matter should have ended there," Frank continued. "Unfortunately, a senior US officer (Lt Col Halt) led the US contingent out into the forest on the second night and took along his tape recorder. The hovering and whizzing lights were sufficiently impressive for him to send a report to the MoD.

"Someone in London recalled the events of the previous August and questions were asked. A few red faces but also some satisfaction and amusement followed... The USAF was 'reassured' at a very senior level and no UK investigation was undertaken – for obvious reasons!"

The bottom line, according to Frank, was the Rendlesham Forest 'aliens' were our 'aliens' on our soil (no encroachment on the US bases) so "no threat to UK security" was the honest response to questions. Frank says he finds it hilarious that the UFO legend in the forest was based on what he calls an old truism: "two nations divided by a common language".

As sceptic Ian Ridpath points out, like many other explanations, the SAS prank sounds superficially plausible but does not fit all the facts. Others whose credibility was tested by the story were less polite. Charles Halt, now one

of ufology's royal family, dismissed it as poppycock and his buddy Nick Pope decided the best response was to launch a furious personal attack upon the messenger – before shamelessly hawking his own response around to anyone in the media who would listen to him.

One man with no axe to grind or agenda to sell is Robin Horsfall, a former SAS

sniper who took part in the famous operation that stormed the Iranian Embassy in 1980 – just six months before the Rendlesham incident. Horsfall tells me the language Frank uses provides "no evidence of a military background". The letter, he says, "is written by a person with a solid grounding in grammar, which in my opinion excludes most SAS operatives during this period including the commissioned officers". More conclusively, as the alleged events happened during his time in Hereford with 22 SAS, he felt sure he would have heard about it.

"We did undertake planned training actions against British military establishments but never against those of the US forces. Working against US units with live ammunition without strict safety protocols could have got people killed, with huge political ramifications. The idea of a revenge prank by [SAS] isn't plausible as the rules controlling pyrotechnical devices within the regiment were very strict and any such action could have resulted in those involved being returned to unit."

I also sent Frank's story to the US Base Commander at the time of the incidents, Col Ted Conrad. It was Conrad who ordered police from the 81st Security Squadron to conduct an informal investigation of

the UFO sightings in the forest reported by his personnel. Col Conrad remains open-minded about what his men saw and is on record as saying one possibility was a prank or hoax. But in this case he agreed with Horsfall: Frank's story simply does not stack up. "US bases are not on US soil, rather all of them remain on sovereign British soil... US citizens who are stationed and work there are the 'aliens'. The SSA was guarded 24/7/365 by armed, trained security personnel who were instructed to shoot to kill, if necessary to prevent a breach," Col Conrad told me.

"It is unthinkable that either side would conduct such an exercise against an important facility where real weapons and ammo were present. The alleged rough treatment of British Special Forces by one US Lieutenant from the 67 ARRS is also unthinkable, but if it had been reported by complaint, the offender would have been more impacted by our disciplinary action than mounting a fake UFO landing."

To paraphrase the folklorist Linda Degh, we may never find resolution as to the 'truth' of any particular legend. But the emphasis upon *possibility* and *plausibility* in stories like Frank's provides them with their latent energy – and their potential to entertain and enthrall their audience. So there we have it folks – another winter's tale from the Rendlesham forest. The truth, though, remains persistently out there.

NOTES

1 In this case, I have a signed confession from the letter-writer and an original copy marked "this is a hoax".

2 *UFO Magazine* vol. 11/3, 1992.

3 Frank's letter was postmarked 30 March and arrived in my pigeonhole at my workplace on 2 April.

4 I have withheld clues that point to towards the letter writer's real identity; just in case you are reading this, Frank.



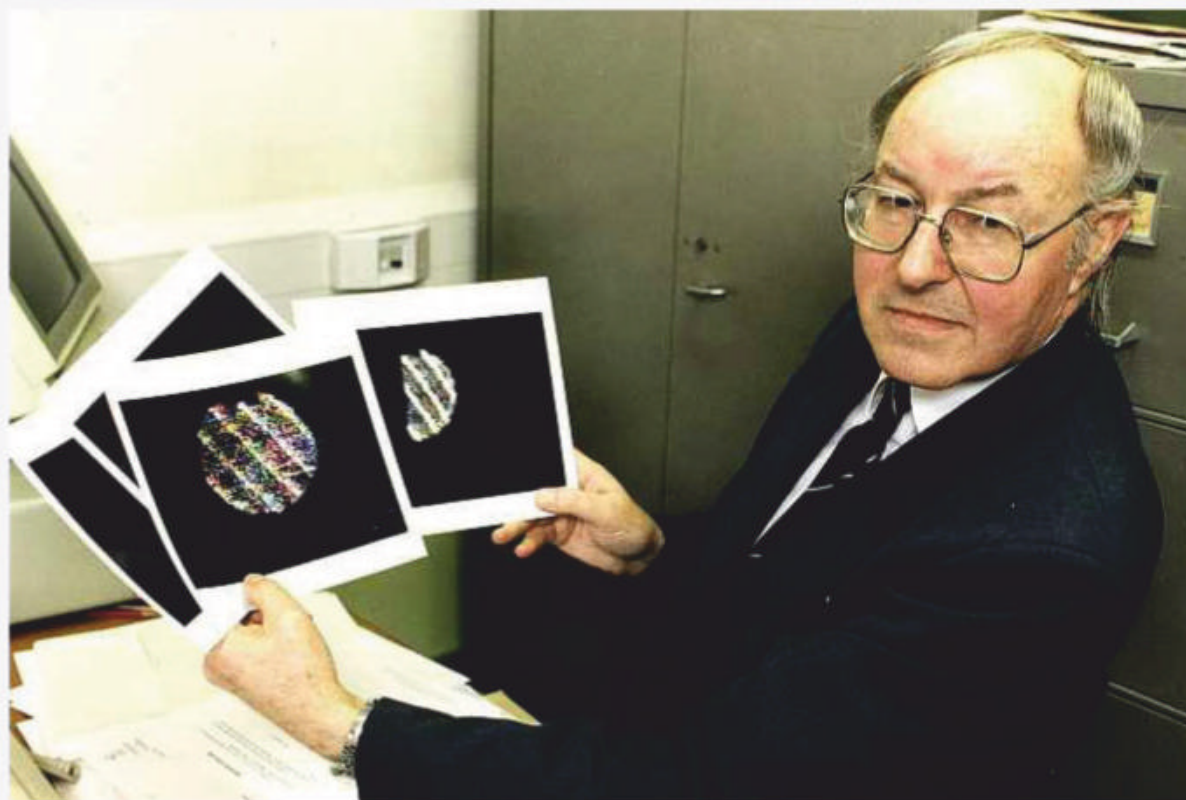
Ghosts and the Moon

ALAN MURDIE asks whether beliefs about the power of the full Moon extend to spectral sightings

The year 2019 is the 50th anniversary of the first Apollo Moon landings when astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin became the first humans to walk upon the surface of the Moon. After seeing the film *First Man* (2018) at the end of last year, I found myself thinking of Scottish astronomer Professor Archie Roy (1924-2012) one of the many thousands of people who helped make the Apollo missions possible. During the 1960s and 1970s, Archie Roy was engaged by NASA using his expertise in celestial mechanics and orbits for the Apollo programme. From the 1960s he also pursued paranormal research, and on becoming President of the Society for Psychical Research in 1992, he devoted much of his Presidential address to the question of life after death (*Proceedings of the SPR* vol.58, 1994-99). With the Scottish Society for Psychical Research he also personally investigated a number of haunted houses, large and small, across Scotland. I wondered if his two scientific paths had ever crossed at any point, and found myself regretting never having asked him the question, “Are you more likely to see a ghost or have a psychic experience at certain phases of the Moon?”

Such a question echoes truly ancient beliefs that the full Moon exerts a special influence over human beings, including enhancing psychic experience and compelling or encouraging certain types of behaviour. The Moon was revered as sacred in many ancient societies such as the Celts, Native Americans and the Aborigines in Australia. The traditional calendars of many societies were based around lunar cycles, including those of the Islamic, Hebrew, Chinese, and Mayan cultures. To this day Christian and Jewish festivals like Easter and Passover remain tied to the lunar cycle. Innumerable magical beliefs and superstitions identify the time of the full Moon as the most desirable one for performing various rituals, spells and conjurations, so is there a possible link with spectral sightings?

Moonlight features in many fictional supernatural tales (as well as in numerous songs and poems) e.g. in M R James stories with the ‘gorgeous moon’ in *The Treasure of Abbot Thomas* or “The moon was shining through the window” in *Lost Hearts*. Yet folklore actually contains



ABOVE: Professor Archie Roy, whose career encompassed both astronomy and paramormal research.

“I was awakened by feeling the pressure of a cold hand, first on my shoulder, then my head”

rather fewer instances than expected. A mounted ghostly knight and horse could be summoned at Wandlebury hillfort, near Cambridge, by crying out “Knight, Knight Come Forth!” under the full Moon.



Archæologist TC Lethbridge tried this and got no response. (*Gogmagog: The Buried Gods*, 1957). A ghostly voice can be heard at full Moon in Money Lane in Horseheath in Cambridgeshire whilst a ghostly dagger appears on a tombstone in Milford Haven, Pembrokeshire, seen many years ago by a Mr Stanley Dove, interviewed by Anthony Hipplesley Coxé (*Haunted Britain*, 1973). Full Moon brings out phantom Danish soldiers at Dent, Yorkshire, and Geoffrey de Manderville (d.1144) at Camlet Moat, Enfield (Alastair Alpin MacGregor, *Phantom Footsteps*, 1959). At Lorton Hall, Cumbria, a Grey Lady appears around the time of the full Moon (*Phantom Ladies*, 1976, by Andrew Green). Spectres

in Essex seem particularly partial to prime moonlit conditions at Mistley, Canvey Island, Bradwell-on-Sea – with Matthew Hopkins, a Viking and the hoofbeats of a galloping horse respectively (see *Essex Ghosts*, 1974, by James Wentworth Day and many diverse sources). Elliot O'Donnell gives a chilling account of the Black Monk of Newstead Abbey, which could amalgamate with moonbeams (see *The Midnight Hearse and other Ghost Stories*, 1965) but the folkloric connection is not as pronounced as one might think.

Full Moon or strong moonlight is mentioned by witnesses in some better attested accounts. A General Barter, when stationed at Pershauw in India, reported seeing an apparition of a man on a pony when “the moon was at the full, a tropical moon, so bright that you could read a newspaper by its light”. By it he recognised the shade as “Lieutenant B. of the 22nd regiment” who had died a few days before. (Reported to the Society for Psychical Research, April 1888; see Sir Ernest Bennett's *Apparitions and Haunted Houses*, 1939).

A ghostly woman was seen at full Moon on several occasions by Edwin Hough, a coachman at F——Hall, Pembrokeshire between September 1881 and October 1882. He provided a striking account: “I was awakened by feeling the pressure of a cold hand, first on my shoulder, and then on

my head. Looking up... I saw the figure of a woman standing looking at me. She was of medium height, dressed in light garments, perhaps cream coloured... made like a dressing-gown, with a girdle or waist-band. She seemed to be about 30 years old; she had a pleasant rather thin face, and a 'wild' expression". He tried but failed to speak to the apparition, which then vanished. "I was not frightened, but agitated, and lay awake the rest of the night. On each occasion the Moon was full... this is the usual time for the appearances."

Around 1930 a witness anonymised as 'Mrs Westfield' reported being terrified by "my bed shaking and vibrating" and sounds of someone shuffling round the bedside who "touched my feet and then began to grope their way up to my face". She struck a match and the form vanished. This occurred on "a dead calm moonlight night." (*Journal of the SPR*, vol.29, 1935-1936).

A Miss Rosemary Williams saw a female apparition at the window of the burned out Borley Rectory, Essex, on the night of 26 March 1939 when the Moon was in last quarter; other researchers considered manifestations at Borley Church favoured the periods of the full or waning Moon.

Of course, tricks of moonlight have been proposed to explain many apparitions. SPR co-founder Mrs Sidgwick considered a report by a witness who saw "a tall white figure... Its eyes were green and glistening, but the rest of the face seemed muffled up" in lodgings at Cassel, Germany, suggesting it was a mistake arising from "a combination of moonlight and a light-coloured cat aided by imagination" – but she admitted: "We have no evidence whatever that there was such a cat about." (Case 239, *Journal of the SPR* vol.6, 1893-94 135).

Witnesses themselves have long been mindful of such possibilities. In York during the 17th century, a gatehouse sentry at Clifford Tower saw a "scroll of paper creep from under the door, which as he imagined by moonshine, turning first into the shape of a monkey, and thence assumed the form of a turkey-cock" (Sir John Reresby's *Memoirs*, temp. James II, quoted in *Notes and Queries*, Nov 1860, p.374), though a story like this might make the reader think 'moonshine' of a different sort was involved, either consumed by the witness or the recorder. However, there was nothing remotely amusing in the experience of Captain GF Russell Colt, a man "brought up not to believe in ghosts or apparitions" who on the night of Saturday, 8 September 1855 initially saw a phosphorescent glow in a curious old room at Inveresk House, Midlothian. He stated: "I decided that it must be fancy, and the moonlight playing on a towel", but on looking again he recognised it as his eldest brother Oliver, lieutenant

in the 7th Royal Fusiliers, staring lovingly and imploringly at him. Rising from his bed, Captain Colt checked for moonlight looking through the window but saw no Moon, "it being dark and raining" (the Moon was dark that night in any event). Readers familiar with crisis apparitions will not be surprised to learn Oliver Colt died on this date, killed during storming the Redan Fortress in the Crimea, his family learning of his death the following week. (*Proc. of the SPR*, vol.1, 1882-1883, 124).

Remaining unproven, and probably empirically unprovable, is whether the Moon exerts any measurable effect on our brains and behaviour. The lunar element in cases of 'lunacy', once automatically accepted, is now rejected. The 18th century jurist Sir William Blackstone defined "A lunatic, or *non compos mentis*, is one who hath... lost the use of his reason and who hath lucid intervals, sometimes enjoying his senses and sometimes not, and that frequently depending upon the changes of the moon". Serious beliefs survived into the 1980s. A Massachusetts doctor, Dr EA Jannino, speculated that 'Moon madness' was a cause of the 'Jack the Ripper' killings in 1888, as well as those of then contemporaneous Boston strangler (Third International Conference of Forensic Immunology, Medicine, Pathology and Toxicology in *Western Folklore*, 1964, p.270). Such opinions seemed to be boosted by scientific studies from 1970, proposing links between lunar phases and diverse social phenomena including murders and other homicides, suicides,

criminal activity, road accidents, mental health issues, psychotic behaviour, child delinquency, disorder on hockey fields and calls to the emergency services. Reputedly, it was even claimed alleged disappearances within the supposed 'Bermuda Triangle' might be connected to the full Moon! (see Arnold Lieber, *The Lunar Effect: Biological Tides and Human Emotions*, 1978; 'Full moon and Crime' by CP Thakur and Dilip Sharma, *British Medical Journal* vol.289 22-29, Dec 1984).

The decipherment of such collected data and its analysis is no mean task. Some studies indicate significant correlations, some minor ones and others none whatsoever. A meta-analysis of 28 lunar-influence studies undertaken in 1985 found many flaws in the literature and no overall evidence of effects. (James Rotton & IW Kelly, 1985, 'The Moon Was Full and Nothing Happened' *Skeptical Inquirer*, vol.10.2, 1985-86). The authors concluded that to establish a lunar influence on behaviour, studies had to be reliable and any relationship should not be trivial, duly finding that "the lunar hypothesis fails on both counts". Admittedly, what may be classed as 'trivial' is open to debate, but even if a larger meta-analysis had been attempted, could one really compare studies involving such multi-determined and diverse behaviours over different territories? Human behaviour and experience are influenced by an infinite number of factors, much depending on how homicides, suicides, and psychotic behaviour are defined and logged to begin with. Such variables could



ABOVE: The burned-out ruin of the notorious Borley Rectory, where Rosemary Williams saw a figure appear at one of the windows on 26 March 1939 when the Moon was in its last quarter.



GHOSTWATCH

render extracting precise evidence of a correlation a well-nigh impossible task. Furthermore, how does one establish a control group free of lunar influence? As Rotton *et al* stated: “without having... a control group” on a planet without a Moon (perhaps a random sample of Venusians), researchers cannot show that a full Moon exerts a causal influence on behaviour.’

Adding to the difficulties of detecting a “signal in the noise” is the possible influence from another celestial body, the Sun. This has been identified by parapsychologists as a problem inherent with many earlier studies when testing for lunar effects on the brain. During the 1970s it was suggested that telepathy and dreaming might be amplified during the full Moon period by gravity. However, this overlooks potential influences exerted by the Sun, and as has been observed by Adrian Ryan, “any claim for biological, psychological or parapsychological influence of lunar phase can only be considered decisive if the possibility of confounding solar rotation effects has been eliminated.” (*Parapsychology: A Handbook for the 21st Century*, 2015, edited by Etzel Cardeña, John Palmer, David Marcusson-Clavertz). Studies by astrophysicist Peter Sturrock and parapsychologist James Spottiswoode tentatively indicate a relationship between performance in psi tests and lunar phases, but they propose any such correlation might stem from changes in the geomagnetism of the Earth, to which both the Sun and Moon contribute. This is leading researchers to look more at geomagnetic cycles rather than lunar ones, with a view to possible influences upon the pineal gland. (See ‘The Relationship between Local and Geomagnetic Activity Mediation and Psi: Literature Review and Theoretical Model’ by Serena M Roney-Dougal, Adrian Ryan and David Luke, 2014, *Journal of the SPR*, vol. 77.2, no. 911).

Regrettably, Archie Roy died before this latest hypothesis involving geomagnetism was published, and it would have been interesting to have obtained his opinion as both an astronomer and a psychical researcher. I also regret not raising lunar influence theories when I discussed the subject of ghosts with TV astronomer Sir Patrick Moore (1923-2012) in 2008. Sir Patrick was a lifelong lunar observer whose Moon maps were utilised by NASA for the Apollo programme. NASA also consulted him regarding Transient Lunar Phenomena, strange luminous spots observed on the Moon over decades, and



LEFT: Robert Graves, whose 1948 book *The White Goddess* linked the Moon with intuitive ‘feminine’ knowledge.

experience they occur in any weather, at any hour, and in all seasons.” (*Haunted Britain*, 1948).

Despite lacking scientific endorsement, faith in lunar effects will prove obstinate to shift. Controversy is destined to continue, conceived by Robert Graves (1895-1985) as an expression of the clash between ‘lunar’ and ‘solar knowledge’. The former is concerned with intuitive, ‘feminine’ reasoning and the latter with deductive, rationalist reasoning, as envisaged in his book *The White Goddess* (1948), where he deplored the modern view ‘where the Moon is despised as a burned-out satellite of the Earth’. The rise of neo-paganism, partly inspired by writings such as Graves’s in subsequent years, has only expanded the number of willing believers in the mysteries of the Moon; Professor Ronald Hutton entitled his

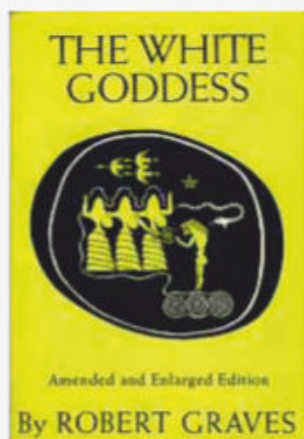
study of modern pagans *The Triumph of the Moon* (2000). Since the 1970s there has been the burgeoning conspiracy theory that mankind never reached the Moon at all – that the whole Apollo enterprise was some vast deception (see **FT94:34-39; 97:22-27, 168:32-39, 332:32-36**). With the Chinese having landed their Chang’e-4 probe on the far side of the Moon in January 2019, a resurgence of such bizarre ideas and some wholly new ones is to be expected.

beloved by Charles Fort (NASA didn’t want astronauts landing on active volcanoes). On certain fortean topics such as UFOs and astrology, the eccentric Sir Patrick could prove most volatile, yet equally would display either amused tolerance or profound interest in many others (see his book *Can You Speak Venusian?*, 1972, and his friendship with entertainer Michael Bentine). Having seen various orthodox astronomical theories collapse dramatically in his lifetime, he robustly championed independence of thought – and regarding ghosts, he believed he had experienced several.

Regrettably, it was also impossible to bring together Patrick Moore and Archie Roy to discuss such topics, as they detested each other. The reasons for this mutual dislike remain opaque to outsiders (perhaps for the best) though Sir Patrick told me it stemmed from Archie Roy declaring himself a reincarnation of the second Astronomer Royal,

Sir Edmund Halley (1656-1741). Colleagues of Archie Roy have been unable to confirm this story.

Thus, my wider and more speculative questions as to the frequency of ghost sightings linked with lunar phases look destined to remain unanswerable. Ironically, weaver of numerous fictions Elliot O’Donnell was correct when declaring: “The idea that apparently ghostly manifestations occur on still, moonlit nights is as fallacious as it is to believe that they invariably occur at midnight, and never in daylight. In my



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KARL SHUKER greets two new discoveries – a spectacular salamander and a ‘dinner snake’

A NEW(T) SALAMANDER

In parts of southern Alabama and the Florida Panhandle, it has long been rumoured that certain swamps are inhabited by a highly elusive mystery animal resembling a very large long-bodied newt or salamander. It is readily distinguished from all known forms by its highly distinctive spotted patterning, earning it the local name of leopard eel. However, scientists had traditionally discounted this cryptid as mythical – until early 2007, that is. This was when, while showing graduate zoology student David Steen around the natural history museum at Alabama’s Auburn University, biologist Dr Craig Guyer tapped a large glass specimen jar containing the preserved carcass of what had been labelled as a greater siren *Siren lacertina* (an aquatic species of eel-like North American salamander with external gills) – an identity that Guyer was not happy with. He believed this specimen might prove to be a new species. Steen and fellow graduate student Sean Graham became obsessed with learning the truth about it and the tales of the mysterious



leopard eel, and spent much of their free time in unpaid field research hoping to locate and procure a specimen in the wild. Finally, on 4 September 2009, Steen captured a living example at Eglin Air Force base, Okaloosa County, Florida. Its dark reticulated patterning matched that of the preserved specimen and descriptions of the leopard eel, and on 8 June 2014 three more individuals were collected in a freshwater marsh adjacent to Lake Jackson in Florida’s Walton County. Following extensive morphological and genetic analysis, this spotted siren’s taxonomic status

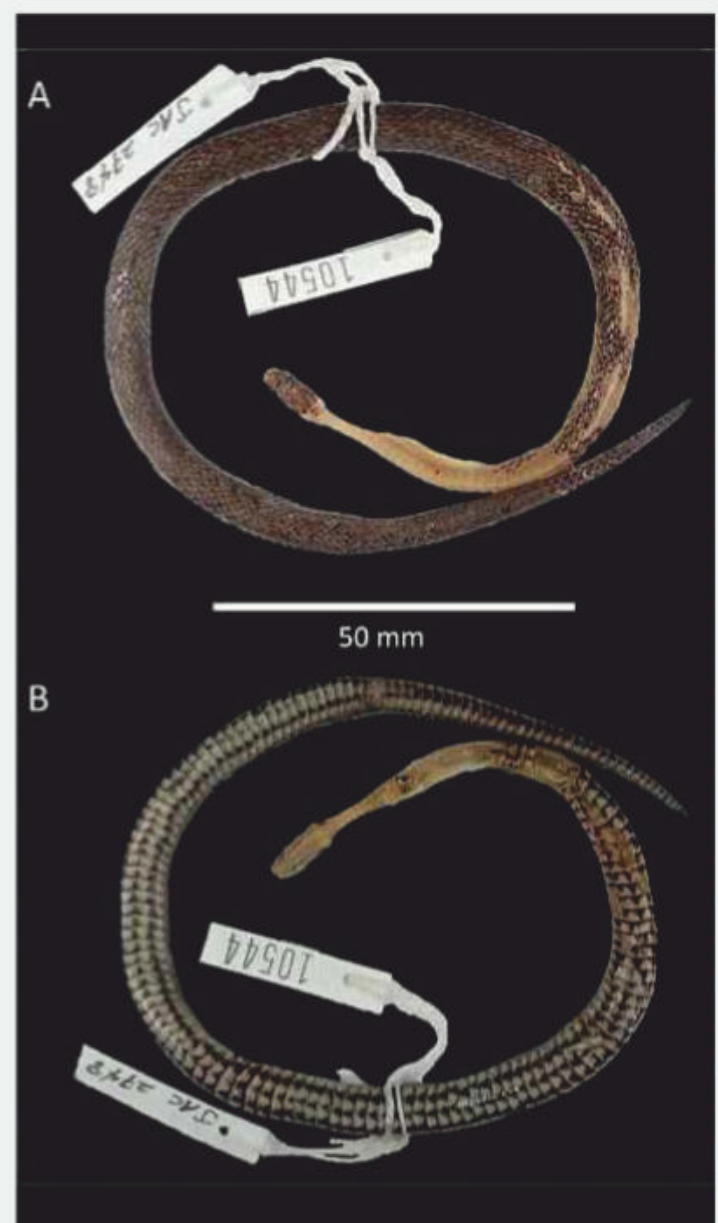
as a bona fide new species was officially confirmed in 2018 via the publication of a formal description, in which it was officially named *Siren reticulata*, the reticulated siren. At up to 2ft (60cm) long, this is truly a fantastic beast, inasmuch as it is among the largest vertebrate species to have been discovered in the US in over 100 years, and once again represents a major

vindication of the classic cryptozoological method – namely, following up on local reports of a mysterious, unfamiliar-sounding beast and obtaining physical specimens, then subjecting them to formal zoological examination, and confirming that it is indeed a species new to science. <https://therevelator.org/giant-salamander-discovered/> (reprinted in *Scientific American*, 17 Dec 2018); www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/2018/12/new-species-of-giant-salamander-siren-discovered-florida/; <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal>.

GUT FEELING FOR SNAKE

Down through the decades, a surprising number of species new to science, including several notable yet hitherto-unknown fishes and molluscs, have been serendipitously discovered inside the guts of various aquatic creatures, but recently a comparable discovery featuring a terrestrial species was formally revealed, albeit more than 40 years after the event. This had taken place in July 1976, in some isolated highlands in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, when a Central American coral snake had been killed by local palm harvester Julio Ornelas-Martínez. Its body was opened up by a team of Texan herpetological researchers, who were very surprised to discover inside its stomach a partially digested snake specimen that did not resemble any species known to them. They duly preserved this mystifying ingested snake, but then set it aside for formal study at a later date – much later, as it turned out. Happily, however, in 2018 the findings of an extensive investigation of the serpent were published, via a scientific paper in the *Journal of Herpetology*. This revealed that it not

only represented a new species but also was so distinct from all other species that it required the creation of an entirely new genus. Officially (and aptly) dubbed *Cenaspis ænigma* (‘mysterious dinner snake’) and currently still known only from the single specimen (an adult male) recovered from the coral snake’s stomach, it is a small burrowing colubroid, just over 10in (25cm) long, and probably spends much of its time underground. Its differentiating morphological characteristics include its undivided subcaudal scales (large plates on its tail’s underside), the shape and covering of its hemipenis (male sexual organ), and its skull’s elongated shape. Unusually, moreover, whereas its dorsal surface is plain, its ventral surface is patterned with three distinctive longitudinal stripes. Being a fossorial species may explain why *Cenaspis* had entirely evaded scientific detection until its type specimen’s very fortuitous discovery. www.bioone.org/doi/10.1670/18-042 27 Nov 2018; www.sciencealert.com/a-new-species-of-snake-has-been-found-in-the-belly-of-another-snake 20 Dec 2018.



MISPLACED MISSION

Bible-basher bumped off by angry Andaman islanders

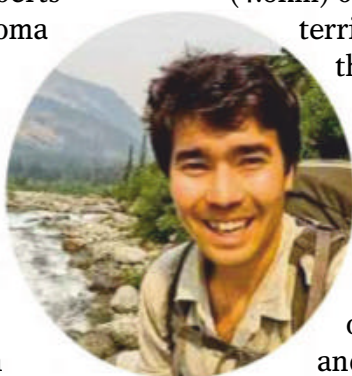
John Allen Chau, 27, from Vancouver, Washington, hoped to visit North Sentinel Island, part of the Andaman chain in the Bay of Bengal, to convert the pre-Neolithic indigenous inhabitants to Christianity. They, however, failed to reciprocate his enthusiasm. The half-Chinese American missionary – a graduate of evangelical Oral Roberts University in Oklahoma who had visited the Andaman Islands on four occasions since 2015 – was met by a volley of arrows and died on the beach on 16 November.

A local policeman said Chau “was on a misplaced adventure in [a] prohibited area to meet uncontacted persons.” He had paid local fishermen to transport him to the island, completing his journey in a kayak, dressed only in black underpants and carrying a waterproof Bible. “He was attacked by arrows but he continued walking,” according to a police source. “The fishermen saw the tribals tying a rope around his neck and dragging his body. They were scared and fled, but returned to

find his body on the seashore.” Later, they witnessed the tribesmen bury his body on the beach. Police got within 1,300ft (400m) of the island on 24 November, but abandoned an attempt to retrieve Chau’s body after being confronted by armed tribesmen.

Outsiders are banned from going within three miles (4.8km) of the tribe’s home territory to protect their way of life and to safeguard them from 21st century diseases, which could easily wipe them out. They speak a language no outsiders understand and are believed to

number around 100, but that’s just a guess. In 2006 two fishermen who moored their boat while they slept were killed when their vessel broke loose and drifted onto the shore. A week later, their bodies were hooked on bamboo stakes facing out to sea, “like scarecrows”. Indian authorities make periodic checks on the tribe from boats anchored at a safe distance from the shore. *D.Telegraph*, 22+26+27 Nov; *D.Mail*, 23 Nov; *Sunday Times*, 25 Nov; *Guardian*, 1 Dec; *NY Times*, 5 Dec 2018.



TOP: Murdered missionary John Allen Chau. ABOVE: A Sentinelese tribesman aims his bow and arrow at an Indian Coast Guard helicopter in a photo from 2004.

233: PUDDING LANE VS THE GREAT PLAGUE

The myth

Say what you like about the Great Fire of London in September 1666, but it did have one silver lining: its



cleansing flames put a sudden stop to the Great Plague of London (1665-66), an epidemic of bubonic plague which, until its carriers were burned away, killed about a quarter of the population.

The “truth”

This particularly gruesome example of always looking on the bright side of life was taught as fact when I was at school, and is still to be found in many books, articles, and TV and radio pieces. When it originated is unclear, but it’s long been dismissed by historians for three key reasons. Firstly, the plague was already in decline months before the fire; in September 1665 there had been thousands of deaths per week, which had fallen to dozens per week by February 1666 when those grandees who had fled London began to return. Secondly, plague cases continued to be reported after the fire. Thirdly, and most conclusively, the blaze was relatively localised, burning about a quarter of London, and if you lay a map of its destruction over a map of the worst-affected plague areas, there is little correlation – several plague hotspots were untouched by the fire.

Sources

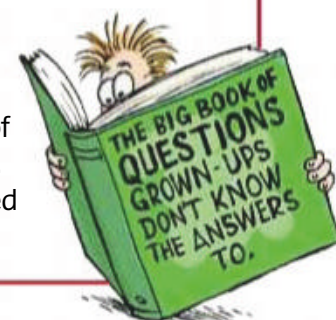
www.museumoflondon.org.uk/discover/three-myths-you-believe-about-great-fire-london; *London the biography* by Peter Ackroyd (Chatto & Windus, 2000); <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/great-plague/>.

Disclaimer

Several aspects of the Great Fire (the number of casualties, for instance) and the Great Plague are currently subject to debate and revision, so please let the letters page know if our facts are out of fashion.

Mythchaser

A reader recalls being told as a child, whenever she asked an adult a difficult question, “Instead of me telling you, you look it up yourself – that way you’ll remember it.” Is there any evidence for the validity of this pedagogic technique – or is it, as she suspects, just a manoeuvre used by lazy teachers and harassed parents?



TELL ME NO LIES

Despite criticism, the use of lie detectors looks set to increase and evolve. **CHRISTOPHER JOSIFFE** tries to get his story straight...

The first lie detector was invented in 1921 by John Larson, a University of California medical student and policeman, who named it the cardio-pneumo-psychograph. Since then, attempts have been made to refine and improve upon his basic design, but the accuracy and utility of lie detectors are still a matter for dispute. Towards the end of his life, Larson despaired of having ever invented what he described as “a Frankenstein’s monster”. *Int. Herald Tribune*, 6 Mar 2007.

There are various methods by which a polygraph machine may be fooled. One ruse is the deliberate inducement of physiological stress symptoms: biting one’s tongue or recalling a distressing memory when answering the ‘control’ questions should result in one’s responses to the genuinely stress-inducing investigative questions not appearing any different. Placing deodorant on one’s fingertips can prevent sweating. Some individuals are able to control their heartbeat or blood pressure; contracting the sphincter muscle is one such technique that can briefly raise one’s blood pressure. *Independent*, 3 Dec 2008.

In the USA, several high-profile cases have highlighted polygraph tests’ failure to identify the truth. Aldrich Ames, the CIA officer who betrayed his country’s secrets to the USSR, passed three tests before his treachery was finally discovered. Polygraph testing of Louise Woodward, the British nanny convicted of involuntary manslaughter of a baby, indicated her innocence, but she was subsequently convicted on other evidence. Leandro Aragoncillo, an FBI analyst based in the White House, was suspected of espionage, sailed through an FBI pre-employment polygraph check, but later pleaded guilty to passing



LEFT: John Larson (right) demonstrates the operation of a polygraph machine or ‘lie detector’.

classified information to Filipino politicians. In a letter from prison, Ames described polygraphy as “junk science” comparable with astrology. *New Statesman*, 16 Oct 2006.

A proposal to trial a new ‘smart lie-detection system’ at EU borders has led to accusations that the EU is promoting pseudoscience. The 4.5m (£3.95m) pilot project, called iBorderCtrl, involves a computer animation of a border guard, personalised according to the gender, ethnicity and language of the prospective traveller, who will have already uploaded pictures of their passport, visa and proof of funds. They are then asked, via webcam, a series of questions such as “what is in your suitcase?” designed to establish their personal background and reason for wishing to enter the EU. Artificial intelligence (AI) software analyses facial micro-expressions for indications of deceit. Travellers deemed to be lying or dissembling are subjected to more thorough vetting. The project will initially be trialled for six months in Hungary, Greece and Latvia; the UK, Spain, Poland, Germany and Cyprus have also expressed interest in utilising

the technology after the initial trials. Early tests indicate an accuracy rate of around 76 per cent, but the iBorderCtrl team are confident they can increase this to 85 per cent. *Private Eye*, 16-29 Nov 2018.

But critics of the system have questioned its scientific basis. Bruno Verschuere, senior lecturer in forensic psychology at the University of Amsterdam, queried the assumption that all liars are stressed, or that this stress manifests as fidgeting or facial movements detectable by the technology. And Bennett Kleinberg, assistant professor in data science at University College London, argued that the project’s implementation could lead to “a pseudoscientific border control.”

Elsewhere, technicians at the University of Arizona (part of the government-funded BORDERS: National Center for Border Security and Immigration consortium), have developed a similar system, AVATAR (Automated Virtual Agent for Truth Assessments in Real-Time), which they hope will be deployed at the US-Mexico border. It uses AI and “non-invasive sensors” to screen prospective entrants to the USA. Like iBorderCtrl’s

advocates, AVATAR’s designers say that it is simply intended to flag up potentially suspicious or high-risk individuals, who are then subjected to more in-depth scrutiny by a human being. *telegraph.co.uk*, 1 Nov; *theguardian.com*, 2 Nov 2018.

Since 2014, probation and police officers in England and Wales have been using more traditional lie detectors to monitor the behaviour of convicted high-risk sex offenders released on licence, who are tested every six months. The classic lie detector (or polygraph machine) functions by measuring pulse rates, skin conductivity (the degree to which an individual is sweating), blood pressure and breathing rates. *D.Telegraph*, 31 July 2012.

If an offender fails a test, they are not automatically returned to prison, but are subjected to more frequent assessments and more thorough investigation. “The aim,” said Don Grubin, professor of forensic psychiatry at Newcastle University, “is resource management. If someone is deemed to be low risk, and has not been trying to meet children, then their computers are subject to a summary review rather than a full forensic examination which can take up to a year.” To date, 166 sex offenders have been returned to prison after testing raised concerns about their behaviour. Offenders included those convicted of child sex offences, child grooming, rape, and possession of child pornography. One individual had been released on condition that he did not use the Internet, and unsatisfactory responses to polygraph questions led police to raid his home, finding indecent images of children



stored on hard drives hidden at his address. *D.Telegraph*, 17 Feb 2018.

The Ministry of Justice, Crown Prosecution Service and police have all stressed that results of these polygraph tests would not be used as evidence in court. However, many scientists remain sceptical about their use. A 2004 British Psychological Society report concluded that whilst the tests could correctly determine if an individual was lying at “fairly high” rates, nevertheless, “incorrect decisions about who is or is not being deceptive occur at rates that are far from negligible.” *Guardian*, 9 Aug 2014.

Critics of the sex offender scheme argue that the very scenario of being subjected to testing that could result in a recall to prison is stress-inducing in itself and likely to generate false-positives. Studies undertaken to determine the efficacy of polygraph tests typically involve volunteers asked to lie or conceal information, and who are offered a reward. “You get maybe £20 or £50 if you beat [the machine], but in real life the stakes are much higher,” said Dr Jamie Horder, of King’s College London’s Institute of Psychiatry. “And because the whole thing is based on emotion and stress, that’s really important.” *D.Telegraph*, 31 July 2012.

The use of lie detectors is not restricted to the law enforcement sector. Government bodies and private companies are increasingly using them too, primarily in the US, Israel, Japan and Canada. Typically, they form part of an investigation into an individual employee suspected of financial wrongdoing or disloyalty. It has been known for a new CEO to send all their senior management personnel for polygraph testing, ostensibly to see if anyone is leaking information from closed board meetings to competitors or to the press. *Int. Herald Tribune*, 18 Feb 2003.

A newer form of lie detector has recently been developed by researchers at Cambridge and Lancaster Universities. Effectively a body suit, it works on one of the principles of the EU’s iBorderCtrl; that liars tend to fidget more often. Using 17 sensors, it registers movement up to 120 times a second in 23 different joints of the human body. In tests, the suit, which costs £30,000, achieved a reliability rate of 70-80 per cent. *D.Telegraph*, 6 Jan 2015.

Another area of research uses magnetic resonance imaging to map the brain. A company called Cephos, based at Tyngsboro, Massachusetts, is one of several who claim to be able to show whether someone is lying via an fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) brain scan. fMRI observes which parts of the brain show greater activity when a question is answered by the subject. Supposedly, the brain of a person telling lies will ‘light up’ in certain areas – notably the anterior cingulate gyrus and the left prefrontal cortex. The ‘cognosensor’, developed by Dr Britton Chance of the University of Pennsylvania, also seeks to detect activity in particular brain areas and employs infra-red light beamed into the subject’s skull and brain. Some of the light is reflected back, and the pattern of reflection indicates activity in specific areas of tissue, due to changes in blood flow to that region of the brain. A third method utilises electroencephalogram (EEG) technology, and is commercially available from Brain Fingerprinting Labs, based in Seattle. Named MERMER (memory and encoding related multifaceted electroencephalographic response), the technique relies upon the idea that if a suspect really had been present at a crime scene, their familiarity with the location will be indicated by certain brain activity. *Economist*, 10 July 2004.

A similar technique,

Brain Electrical Oscillations Signature (BEOS), developed by a Bangalore neuroscientist, has already been used in a criminal trial. A court in the Indian state of Maharashtra jailed a murder suspect for life, partly on the basis of the BEOS brain scanning technique. The suspect is connected to an EEG, while a policeman reads their account of the crime. If the suspect is guilty, so the theory goes, those regions of the brain associated with memory will ‘light up,’ indicating a memory of having perpetrated the crime. One obvious concern is whether similar results would be obtained had the suspect merely read about the crime in the news, therefore having a ‘memory’ of it.

Philosopher AC Grayling has robustly criticised the technique, arguing that it has no greater probative value than the ducking stools used upon suspected witches hundreds of years ago. And many neuroscientists have expressed misgivings about the use of such scans in court, arguing that they have not been tested rigorously enough and could yield false positives. Judge John Kennedy of the New Jersey Judiciary, in a meeting of 50 of his peers, declared that while brain scans could indicate whether a defendant was in pain or mentally competent to stand trial, they could not be used to determine guilt or innocence. *New Scientist*, 20 Sept, 21 Dec 2008.

Voice Risk Analysis (VRA), a form of lie detector that doesn’t require the subject’s physical presence, was developed in 2000 by an Israeli company, Nemesysco. VRA supposedly detects aural signs of stress associated with deception, can be used on telephone conversations, and has been employed in several countries, including the UK. In 2010, after a series of trials over a three-year period costing £2.4m, the Department for Work and Pensions announced that it was abandoning VRA to uncover benefit cheats, finding

it too unreliable. However, in 2014, 24 local authorities said they still employ VRA as a method of detecting housing benefit fraud. A spokesperson for Capita (who administer housing benefit claims), defended the use of VRA technology, saying that the call handler ultimately makes the decision whether to grant or refuse a claim, rather than the computer. An ‘SNS’ (subject not sure) or ‘HR’ (high risk) alert message displayed on the handler’s screen during the phone interview would simply encourage the handler to investigate further. *Guardian*, 18 Sept 2007.

One criticism is that people who stammer are liable to be flagged up as liars. Another is that people living in poverty and dependent on benefits for their daily existence are likely to display stress indicators when faced with the prospect of sanctions. *Guardian*, 9 Nov 2010; *D.Telegraph*, 31 July 2012; *Guardian*, 10 Mar 2014.

Other techniques are in development. Each person’s knees are thought to be unique to the individual, and could potentially be scanned via MRI with a supposed 93 per cent accuracy. Electrogastrograms have also been trialled, measuring nerve activity in the gut; University of Texas scientists found a significant increase in activity when subjects were lying, correlating closely with increased heart rates. *New Scientist*, 5 Nov 2005; *Metro*, 25 Jan 2013.

Despite experts’ misgivings, there’s no shortage of new lie detection devices being patented and marketed by private companies. Naturally, they all claim high rates of accuracy. As previous technologies fall by the wayside, having been shown to be too error-prone, this only encourages the search for a superior alternative, rather than an acknowledgement that technological examination of the human mind will always be fallible. *For more on lie detectors, see FT170:12, 57.*

NECROLOG

This month, we say goodbye to a professional prankster who spent over half a century orchestrating elaborate hoaxes that fooled the world's media



EVERETT COLLECTION INC / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: Alan Abel (left) in his 1971 film *Is There Sex After Death?* ABOVE RIGHT: A 1977 literary effort by 'Omar the Beggar'.

ALAN ABEL

Long before *The Onion* began printing farcical news articles, there was Alan Abel. A former jazz drummer and stand-up comic who was later a writer, campus lecturer and filmmaker, Abel was best known as a perennial public gadfly in the mould of PT Barnum. Today, in the Internet age, anyone can be a Nigerian prince; in Abel's time, however, the hoaxer's art – involving intricate planning, hiring actors, donning disguises, printing official-looking letterheads, staging news conferences and having the media swallow the story hook, line and sinker – entailed, for better or worse, a level of old-time craftsmanship whose like will probably not be seen again.

Abel's first major hoax, the "Society for Indecency to Naked Animals", or SINA – which sought "to clothe all naked animals that appear in public, namely horses, cows, dogs and cats, including any animal that stands higher than 4 inches or is longer than 6 inches" – began in May 1959. It starred his friend Buck Henry, later a well-known actor and screen-

writer, as the group's puritanical president, G Clifford Prout. The campaign, intended as a send-up of censorship – with slogans such as "A nude horse is a rude horse" – found a bevy of authentic adherents, with SINA chapters springing up across the US. Over the next few years, the organisation's activities (including a 1963 picket of the White House by Abel, who demanded that Jacqueline Kennedy clothe her horses) were faithfully reported by the *New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle* and CBS News. The group was exposed as a hoax by *Time* magazine in 1963.

Abel learnt the value of hucksterism from his father Louis, who kept a general store in Coshocton, Ohio. "He'd put 'Limit – Two to a Customer' in front of the things that wouldn't sell," Abel told the *New Yorker* in 1990, "and they'd be gone in a minute." Alan joined the Army in 1943 and was assigned to the 29th Army Air Forces Band. He earned a BA in education from Ohio State University in 1950, after which he tried various jobs, but found the grey flannel life was not for him.

Then in 1959 he found himself stuck in backed-up traffic on a Texas highway. What had brought things to a standstill was a cow and bull swiving in the middle of the road. As Abel studied the aghast faces of his fellow drivers, the seeds of SINA were sown.

In another Abel hoax, a woman pretending to be a campaign worker handed out literature supporting one Yetta Bronstein, a phantom Jewish grandmother from the Bronx, for president in 1964 (when Barry Goldwater ran against LBJ), and at least once afterward. Her slogan: "Vote for Yetta and things will get betta." Her manifesto included fluoridation, national Bingo tournaments and the installation of truth serum in congressional drinking fountains. The campaign attracted a small coterie of actual supporters. Never seen in person, Yetta was voiced by Abel's wife Jeanne, in a spate of telephone and radio interviews.



Then there was Omar's School for Beggars, a New York City institution founded amid the recession of the 1970s, which claimed to teach the nouveau poor the gentle art of panhandling. Omar Rockford (a black-hooded Abel) and his "pupils" were the subject of credulous coverage by many news outlets, including the *Miami Herald* and *New York* magazine.

There was the putative winner of the New York State Lotto jackpot in 1990, an actress billed as a cosmetologist from Dobbs Ferry, NY; she poured champagne by the gallon in a hired Manhattan hotel suite and threw dollar bills from the window as the news media salivated. "\$35 MILLION AND SHE'S SINGLE," the front page of the *New York Post* crowed the next day. There were also the Topless String Quartet, with which, Abel said, an unsuspecting Frank Sinatra wanted to book a recording session; the Ku Klux Klan Symphony Orchestra, which, he said, the failed presidential candidate and former Klan grand wizard

David Duke briefly accepted an invitation to conduct; Females for Felons, a group of Junior Leaguers who selflessly donated sex to the incarcerated; the mass "fainting" of audience members during a live broadcast of *The Phil Donahue Show*; his "discovery" (he posed as a former White House employ-

ee) of the missing 181 1/2 minutes from the Watergate tapes; Euthanasia Cruises (participants would jump into the sea after three days of partying); Citizens Against Breastfeeding, because "it is an incestuous relationship between mother and baby that manifests an oral addiction leading youngsters to smoke, drink and even become



anti-social”; his campaign to delete Wednesday and establish a four-day working week; and a great many others.

Abel faked his own death from a heart attack in 1979, orchestrated with characteristic military precision and involving a dozen accomplices. The sad news was confirmed to the *New York Times* by several rigorously rehearsed confederates. One masqueraded as the grieving widow; another posed as an undertaker, answering fact-checking calls from the newspaper on a dedicated phone line that Abel had installed, complete with its own directory-information business listing. After his obituary was published on 2 January 1980, Abel, symbolically rising from the grave, held a gleeful news conference, and a much-abashed *New York Times* ran a “correction” two days later.

As Abel often had to explain, he didn’t perpetrate his hoaxes to fleece anyone; he made a point of returning donations sent by innocents to his spurious causes. His roguery was a brand of performance art: equal parts self-promotion, social commentary, study of the breathtaking naiveté of press and public, and pure old-fashioned high jinks. However, as he discovered, it carried two occupational hazards: penury, and the feeling on the part of the people you are trying to sway that you have cried wolf once too often. He wrote, produced and directed two comic mock-documentaries with his wife Jeanne: *Is There Sex After Death?* (1971) and *The Faking of the President* (1976). His books included *The Great American Hoax* (1966); *The Confessions of a Hoaxer* (1970); *Don’t Get Mad – Get Even!* and *How to Thrive on Rejection* (both 1983); and several drum instruction guides. A documentary about his life, *Abel Raises Cain* (2004), made by his daughter Jenny Abel with Jeff Hockett, is available on DVD.

Alan Irwin Abel, prankster, born Zanesville, Ohio 2 Aug 1924; died Southbury, Connecticut 14 Sept 2018, aged 94.



FAIRIES, FOLKLORE AND FORTEANA

SIMON YOUNG FILES A NEW REPORT FROM THE INTERFACE OF STRANGE PHENOMENA AND FOLK BELIEF

IN SEARCH OF BOBBITT’S HOLE

Can you imagine any supernatural monster with a less scary name than Bobbitt? Yet I’ve recently been amassing proofs that a monster with just that name used to haunt the marshes of Essex and Suffolk (and North Carolina). The proof is suggestive rather than definite. But let me make the case.

I have found six different places called Bobbitt’s Hole in a relatively small area of eastern England. The furthest north is at Babergh in Suffolk; the furthest south at Prittlewell in Essex. Now at first glance this is hardly a cause for excitement. Bobbitt is a mediæval nickname for Robert, literally ‘Little Bob’, which was attested in East Anglia and in Gloucestershire. So, nothing to see here, move along? Well, there are reasons for hanging around for a minute more at these Holes (usually hollows of some kind). First, few English place names with ‘Hole’ are named for owners. There are, for instance, no ‘Bob’s Holes’, in the large data dump of over a million place names recorded on the six inch OS maps published around 1900. In fact, in that same dataset there are only two ‘John’s Holes’ and no ‘Smith’s Holes’. To find, then, six holes owned by men with a rare name in an area of about 50 square miles is simply incredible. Then there is the Bobbitt’s Hole in North Carolina, a pool, which was named in a period when

the forename Bobbitt had died out. However, Holes were frequently – in Britain and the 13 colonies – named after supernatural beings. Indeed, England and the Scottish Lowlands have scores of Boggart Holes, Bog(g)le Holes, Fairy Holes, Hob Holes, Mermaid Holes, Witch Holes and many others. Now Holes are also named for other things: animals (Frog Hole),

what they have in them (Stone Hole), their size (Little Hole)... But none of these can explain Bobbitt.

Then, there is a final consideration, for me the clincher. One of the most important names in what Lewis Spence called “the minor traditions of British mythology” was the fairy Hob who lived in holes and caves up and down the country (see FT330:58-59). The origin of the word ‘Hob’ is, like Bobbitt, a diminutive of the name ‘Robert’. This is probably also true of the Westmorland bogey, ‘Dobbie’. Mediæval

Britons evidently liked calling their fairies by some version of ‘Robert’. Put these bits of a very incomplete jigsaw together and we seem to see traces of a long-forgotten English goblin. If Bobbitt was an Essex cousin of Hob, then he probably hung around farmsteads, by turns helping and terrifying local families: and suitably enough the Bobbitt’s Holes I’ve found were often associated with what were once solitary houses.

Simon Young’s new book *Magical Folk: British and Irish Fairies* is out now


PUT THESE BITS OF
AN INCOMPLETE
JIGSAW
TOGETHER AND
WE SEE TRACES
OF A LONG-
FORGOTTEN
ENGLISH GOBLIN



Diversions and dot-joiners

PETER BROOKESMITH surveys the latest fads and flaps from the world of ufological research

**GREAT REVIVAL and DIVINE HEALING
CAMPAIGN SHAKES LOS ANGELES**
2325 IN ALTARS!
HEAR EVANGELIST JAGGERS
TONIGHT, SAT.—“WHEN TWO WORLDS COLLIDE”
Subject Sunday Night 7:00 P.M.
“WHO ARE THE LITTLE MEN IN THE
FLYING SAUCERS?”
BROTHER JAGGERS KNOWS!
A Tremendous Prophetic Message!
MONDAY NIGHT:
“The Road to Freedom”
The Future of the Church
In Los Angeles Foretold!
Come Early for a Seat at the
Great Tent Cathedral
WASHINGTON and HILL ST.
THOUSANDS OF SEATS—
EVERY NIGHT NEXT WEEK
SPECIAL!! SUNDAY MORNING 9:45 A.M.
HEAR MUSICAL PROGRAM BY BROTHER JAGGERS
AT THE WORLD CHURCH, 4050 WEST PICO BLVD.
Playing on the strings of a Piano in imitation of a Swiss
Harp. Attend the World Church Sunday School.



A LONG, LONG TIME AGO...

One of the most entertaining threads on the transmigrated Fortean message board is ‘Fortean Headlines’. (This forum was formerly the FTMB, and let’s hear another huge cheer please for the indefatigable mods whose sterling work kept the whole thing going, seamlessly, in one piece.) The thread diverts one with many a wondrous ambiguity, as well as extraordinary facts such as that someone appointed a Mr W Anker to the editor’s chair of a Huddersfield newspaper, and a colleague said he would “seize the opportunity with both hands”. A hard one to pull off, you might say. Now swivel your chair. The excellent Curt Collins recently treated us, on his blog ‘The Flying Saucers That Time Forgot’, to a brief history of one OL Jaggars, a revivalist preacher of the 1940s and ’50s. Besides the standard fare – the lame would walk, the blind would see, after one of his healing services – he also claimed to know all about flying saucers and how some people had been abducted by them. There seems to have been precious little about all this in his actual preaching, or his books, and interested parties have found his abductees rather difficult to track down, *quelle surprise*. I was surprised, though, by a small box in one of Jaggars’s advertisements that I found, snooping about online. Pick the bones out of it as you will, you must surely admit this is a fortean headline *par excellence*: *How to*

resurrect the dead at a respectable funeral. And at an *unrespectable* one?

ANY OLD DOTS WILL DO

The also-excellent Jason Colavito, whose blog I recommended a while back, has not uttered a single *really* naughty word on it since I called him ‘potty-mouthed’. I don’t know whether to be pleased or disappointed at this in itself, but I have to tender congratulations on his iron self-control in commenting on an interview in *Inverse* magazine with David Hatcher Childress, who over the years has expounded many an alternative fact (he is what you might call ‘differently informed’). Now, I have long maintained that the differently-informed join up alternative facts, or daft dots, that are as far away as possible from one other, chuck in a bit of CIA mind-control and a dash of the Rothschilds, and they have a whole new hypothesis to get their fans hopping. Childress seems to have outdone himself this time, though he misses out the international bankers and even forgoes a mention of the Nazis. First, he avers that the gubbmint is using popular culture to acclimatise us all to a visitation from outer space. I’ve been hearing this battered chestnut since at least the release of *Close Encounters* in 1979, and it was probably old then. But things soon improve, if that’s the word. Bigfoot, he solemnly announces, is a space-alien hybrid, the missing link between us and the apes. Colavito remarks that “Childress is clearly spouting half-formed bullshit without so much as considering how his proposal could be reconciled with physical evidence, let alone that the concept of the ‘missing link’ is a holdover from Victorian science. It must be nice when you can wave off any problems with the magic words ‘aliens did it.’” Not that Childress would be the first. Nor is this the worst he has to offer.

Aliens, by the way, run hospitals under the ocean (treating whom?) and “have medicine to cure every disease but choose not to help most people.” It would be nice to know why not. Could it be that they’re not here (or there either)? Here is Jason C again: “*Most* bizarrely, Childress endorsed the hollow Moon hypothesis... that’s been going around for the past half-century, based on a piece of Russian propaganda from the 1960s aimed at Western audiences. Childress alleged that aliens created the Moon by inflating an asteroid. Yes, really. ‘Like a glass blower blows glass, you go out into the asteroid belt, get yourself an

asteroid, and with your alien technology you superheat that asteroid. Then you blow into it to make a giant space station,’ he said.” Whence, we presume, the aliens descended with a bunch of rorty Bigfeet with super-enhanced pheromones, who bowled the simian maidens over and made the human race. Oh yes.

A comment on this from one calling himself Jockobadger read: “Surely these people don’t really believe this shite do they? Bigfoot the Missing Link? Hollow Moon? Are they all getting rich with this tripe?” Strikes me as a fair question, although I doubt they’re getting rich, exactly. Along with, I suspect, many others, I should dearly love to know if Childress and his ilk really do believe the stuff they pump out. I fear some do, albeit on a sample of one. Long years ago I had cause to socialise from time to time with the late Brinsley le Poer Trench (below), *alias* the Earl of Clancarty, who thought he’d found a satellite photo that proved his thesis that the Earth was hollow. He wasn’t at all fazed by trenchant disproofs of his evidence. He’d also had some dealings with a gent who was going to prove the Hollow Earth theory by going down a shaft that, he said, descended from beneath the Great Pyramid (it would, wouldn’t it?). Every so often, Brinsley said, he would get a postcard from this wag telling him how far down he’d got. Unfortunately I forget how this saga ended, but I do recall thinking it would be unkind to ask if the pillar-boxes dotted along this shaft for the convenience of travellers were bright red. However, Childress is, I suspect, rather less innocent than the harmless old Earl, and a good deal more cynical. But you never know...





Corrie: Lancashire hotpot hotspot

JENNY RANGLES wonders why an actress's 42-year-old UFO sighting became a 2019 headline...

New Year's Day can be a mini-silly season. Journalists have been off work over the holiday, stories are hard to find, and things that would be ignored on other days are deemed 'big news'. Such was the case in the first 24 hours of 2019, when 'news' broke that a major UFO encounter had taken place. It made multiple tabloids and was even given the front-page banner headline in the *Daily Star*. Betty Turpin, the character who served hotpot behind the bar at the Rovers Return on *Coronation Street* – the longest running soap in TV history, 'Corrie' to its fans – had once seen a flying saucer.

Sadly, the woman who played the character had died seven years earlier, and her "close encounter over the cobbles", as one report in another paper had it, took place 42 years ago, in 1977. So what remarkable episode was being revealed? It actually came from a book written by UFO researchers Jon Hanson and Dawn Holloway as part of the *Haunted Skies* series they have been producing for the last decade – an excellent venture, documenting by period the best cases from various sources as a mammoth published record, akin to the usually inaccessible archives of UFO societies around the country. This particular volume (1975–1977) was actually released six years ago, making it doubly curious that this became the UFO story of the New Year.

So what actually happened to actress Betty Driver? For a start, the sighting was nowhere near the cobbles of the fictional *Coronation Street*, then being filmed on a set at the Granada TV studios at Quay Street, central Manchester. In fact, Betty and her sister Freda saw the UFO in March 1977 from their home in the posh suburb of West Didsbury, several miles to the south. From their lounge, they saw a "misty halo" floating in the sky, despite the fact that it was a stormy evening with a strong gale blowing. After 15 minutes, the sisters found the courage to go outside to watch, taking their three boxer dogs with them – which quickly fled back indoors and hid under a table, "scared" by the UFO. The object then went up into the sky and disappeared, after which the wind calmed down.

If it was the UFO that scared the animals this would be intriguing, but the Driver sisters noted the wind was so severe when they opened the door that it was almost impossible to stand without being knocked over – an alternative explanation for why the dogs were not keen to stay outside. Allegedly, others saw and reported the UFO, but the media later dismissed it as



a balloon, which seemed odd given the weather and the fact it did not move for a lengthy period. Months later the sisters saw something else while driving near Ellesmere Port on the Wirral. On this occasion an "object" flew parallel with their car for some distance and was seen by others. As they reached a built up area, it disappeared. UFO sightings on the north Cheshire motorway to the Wirral are common, as flights landing and taking off from Liverpool Airport, out of view across the Mersey, can easily be mistaken for something strange. Perhaps the most telling thing about these reports is that the sisters chose not to go public with them because they were scared of ridicule, something that deters many witnesses.

Such is the gist of this episode, but there are a few nuances that the media missed which I am, by chance, able to illuminate. Having lived in the Manchester area much of my life, I have had a long association with *Coronation Street* and have interviewed a number of the cast about their paranormal experiences. Actor Bill Roache, who plays Ken Barlow and is well known to have interest in spiritual matters, even attended a MUFORA (Manchester UFO Research Association) conference where I spoke around the time of Betty Driver's encounter; he asked a question, stunning the audience, who immediately recognised his voice!

Indeed, MUFORA actually held meetings in the Granada building at Quay Street overlooking the Corrie set! We had two, discussing the latest sightings, on 8 and 15 March 1977; most probably the latter was the very date of the Didsbury incident, as we received several reports and had two meetings in that week because so much was happening. More to the point, a wind speed of 97 knots was recorded

in the north-west on 15 March as severe gales struck the area, which fits the sighting report. Peter Warrington and myself, from MUFORA, were also working that week on a series of regional features for Granada TV, taking advantage of the fact that we were in the middle of a localised wave of sightings that hit from February to May 1977. One case, from 28 February, featured animals too, when screeching cats awoke a witness who observed a large "top shape" in the sky with a "fuzzy halo" round it, much as the Driver sisters described. The most dramatic events in that 1977 wave were on the night of 8/9 March, coinciding with the first of our two MUFORA meetings; at the second one, we discussed these events at the same time that the Driver sisters' sighting was occurring in Didsbury. It was almost as if the UFO mystery was laughing at us by staging two big events on the very nights we were beside the Corrie set discussing what to do about this flood of reports!

On that first night of 8/9 March at about 8.30pm, four nightshift workers at an Oswaldtwistle, Lancashire, factory saw a shape-shifting object in the sky. One man shone an industrial torch up at it, when it seemed to respond by projecting a beam of light towards them. Further sightings occurred, including a coachload of 40 day trippers who said they stopped to watch a light near Barnoldswick. It looked like a huge star and, through binoculars, appeared to be rotating with pieces falling off. The spectacle culminated at 3.10am in Nelson, Lancashire, with the famous 'car stop' case in which a huge cigar shape with multiple lights flew over two night workers right above Pendle Hill, long associated with spooky goings-on. Their car engine and lights failed and they felt a sensation of pressure pushing down on them as they attempted to escape. They were left with watering eyes and tingling skin.

So what did cause the Driver sisters' sighting? Clearly, not a balloon, given the gale and the stationary nature of what they saw. Usually, when so many other reports occur in a short period, the first thing to look for is a bright astronomical body – and Venus was present during the seven days between these events at magnitude -4.5 and with almost no visible Moon to interfere. It was in the west and setting. Almost certainly, it explains the sightings on the 8 March, but not the car stop later that night, because Venus had gone below the horizon long before. It may also have been what the Driver sisters observed a week later – though the *Daily Star* would prefer otherwise.

THE COSMIC JOKER

Might a variety of anomalous phenomena, from UFOs to ghosts, share a common origin, despite traditionally being placed in different categories? And could that origin be a deceptive and manipulative higher intelligence? **PETER McCUE** explores the theatre of the paranormal and asks if some sort of master trickster is working behind the scenes.

According to the ‘psychosocial hypothesis’ (PSH), supposedly paranormal and UFO events can be explained in prosaic terms, such as misperception, fantasy-proneness, hoaxing, and mendacious reporting by elements of the media. Some cases may, of course, be explicable in those terms. But when the PSH is taken to the extreme – when it’s arrogantly assumed that *all* cases would yield to a conventional explanation if only sufficient information were available – it takes on the flavour of a fundamentalist religion.

Those on the other side, including me, contend that the weight of evidence, from both experimental work and spontaneous cases, defies conventional explanation. However, the ‘believer’ group is heterogeneous, with members ranging from the cautious to the embarrassingly credulous.

PARANORMAL THEATRE

Paranormal and UFO phenomena could be described as being very ‘theatrical’ in nature, which may be an overlooked clue to their origin. Take, for instance, alleged encounters with ‘black-eyed kids’ (BEKs). A typical case might entail someone who hears repeated knocking on his or her front door. The householder opens it and sees a couple of children, who ask to be let in. But the wording of their request is odd, and the witness senses that something isn’t right. This is shockingly confirmed when the children look up, displaying completely black eyes. The terrified householder then closes the door on the creepy visitors.

Stuart Ferrol (**FT322:26-32**) claims that “the first reported [BEK] sighting came from [the] journalist Brian Bethel in his hometown of Abilene, Texas, in 1996.” And writing in the same issue (**FT322:29-30**), Jenny Coleman links BEK reports with aspects of popular culture in the 1990s. For example, she notes that black-eyed characters appeared in the fictional TV



LEFT: Does the phenomenon of Black Eyed Kids predate the Internet, or is it – as the psychosocial hypothesis would suggest – an urban legend?

there’s a tricksterish intelligence behind many forteen phenomena, it may draw on contemporary folklore themes in generating some of its theatrical paranormal displays. In any event, Ferrol and Coleman’s historical claims are questionable, since David Weatherly – a US-based researcher and writer – states that he’s found BEK accounts that predate both the Internet and television.¹

The UFO historian Richard Dolan describes a highly theatrical incident that reportedly occurred in the Canary Islands on the night of 22 June 1976, involving Dr Francisco Julio Padron and his driver, Francisco Estevez.² The men were heading to Gáldar, in the north of Gran Canaria, when they saw a large spherical object hovering just above the ground, some 60 yards off the road. Estevez brought the car to a sharp halt.

According to Padron, the object was perfectly round and about the size of a three-storey building. Stars could be seen through it, and it contained two human-like figures, well over six feet tall, wearing bright red garments and cloth-like helmets or turbans of some sort. Their heads seemed to glow. According to Estevez, they had very bright, large eyes. The radio in the car went dead, and Padron and Estevez felt intensely cold. The object began to rise. It expanded to an incredible size, like that of a 20-storey building. Then, it assumed the shape of a spindle surrounded by a halo, and shot off at an amazing speed. Padron and Estevez called at a nearby farmhouse and discovered that at least one of the residents had seen the object, which he described as a bright, bluish sphere containing two red things that looked like human forms. His television had reportedly cut out just before Padron and Estevez’s arrival.

Other witnesses apparently saw the

There were two humanoid figures wearing bright red garments

series *The X-Files* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. In line with the PSH, she contends that it’s conceivable “that the 1990s, with the birth of the Internet and these kinds of cultural influences... brought forth the mythos of the Black-Eyed Kids”; and she suggests that “the BEKs have all the hallmarks of [an] urban legend”. Her comments could be taken to mean that she doubts whether there have been any genuinely paranormal BEK incidents. But if

UFO as well. They included the crew of an offshore Spanish naval ship, whose captain stated that they'd observed "an intense yellowish-bluish light" moving from the shore towards their position. Initially, they took it to be an ordinary aircraft, but then it stopped, turned off its light, and emitted a rotating light beam for two minutes. Then, it resumed its intense halo of yellowish and bluish light, which remained where it was for 40 minutes. The light then seemed to split in half. The upper part made a rapid, spiralling climb, and then vanished. Dolan explains that the glow from the halo (from the part that didn't spiral upwards, presumably) continued to light up parts of the land and ocean, although the ship's radar never detected the object.

These, and other, sightings in the Canary Islands have been attributed to the launching of US submarine-based Poseidon missiles.³ Needless to say, if the witness testimony cited above is accurate, it's hard to square with that explanation.

A DIRECTING INTELLIGENCE?

In cases involving greys, bigfoots, fairies, ghosts, black-eyed children and suchlike, it's often assumed – naively, in my view – that there's a correlation between the number of supposed entities encountered and the number of intelligent beings actually involved. For example, if three humanoids are reported to have been seen beside a landed UFO, commentators are likely to assume that three separate beings were involved, although opinions might differ as to their origin (whether, for example, they were extraterrestrial or 'interdimensional'). Similarly, if two different ghosts are seen in a house, people might infer that they represent two different 'earthbound spirits'.

But there's no need for this assumption if we construe the phenomena as orchestrated theatrical performances. From this perspective, the perceived entities and UFOs can be understood as temporary 'stage props' – creations of the moment, with no enduring existence. The intelligence behind such displays might have a range of 'tools' at its disposal. For instance, if the dramatic performance requires that witnesses see an apparition, or think that they've seen one, that effect could be achieved by inducing a collective hallucination. Alternatively, it could be produced by a transient materialisation, or by tampering with the memory of the witnesses (inserting a compelling, but false, recollection of having just seen an apparition). The notion of memory tampering is credible, because people involved in close encounter UFO cases often report periods of amnesia or 'missing time'.

The intelligence behind seemingly different types of paranormal phenomena could be of a unitary nature. In other words, we may be dealing with a single 'master trickster' or 'cosmic joker' rather than a multitude of different intelligences. For brevity, I'll refer to it as *the trickster*.



MACCANTI / FLICKR / CREATIVE COMMONS

LEFT: Gáldar, Gran Canaria, where in 1976 two witnesses reported seeing a large spherical object containing strange humanoid figures hovering above the road.

'OVERLAP CASES'

Traditionally conceived, ghosts, UFOs, bigfoot, and so on are different categories of phenomena, and there should be few, if any, cases that combine elements from them. But if they're all orchestrations of the trickster, there's no reason why component elements couldn't be combined. And, indeed, it's not hard to find overlap cases.

Stan Gordon discusses a rash of UFO sightings and bigfoot encounters that occurred in Pennsylvania in 1972-4.⁴ A particularly fascinating case came to his attention in the autumn of 1973. Since the following is a brief summary, I've omitted some of the details. The events occurred outside Uniontown, in Fayette County. They began with a UFO sighting by multiple witnesses, including a 22-year-old man whom Gordon refers to, pseudonymously, as Steve Palmer. Steve and two boys went to a field on his father's farm, where the UFO seemed to have landed. They saw a huge, white domed structure there, with a flattish base, although previously, when the object was airborne, witnesses had seen it as spherical and red in colour. It appeared to be on the ground or just above it. A whirring sound was coming from it, and there was a smell in the air somewhat like burning rubber. Steve and the boys noticed two creatures walking slowly towards them. They were hair-covered, had glowing green eyes, no visible neck, and very long arms. One seemed to be over eight feet tall, the other about seven feet in height.

Steve fired a tracer shot over them. Then, when he fired a second such shot towards them, the larger creature reached up, as if to grab the projectile. At that point, the UFO vanished, leaving a ring of luminosity, and the whirring sound also ceased. The creatures headed towards a wooded area. For some reason, Steve fired three live shots at them, but neither showed any sign of having been harmed. Later on, he returned to the field with a state trooper. Another bigfoot encounter ensued, although from what Gordon writes, it seems to have entailed only one creature. Gordon and some colleagues arrived on the scene later that night, and there were further odd occurrences. For example, Steve displayed strange behaviour, and the air seemed to become permeated with a very strong, sickening smell. Steve, now deceased, went on to have further paranormal experiences over the years.

Greg Long describes an intriguing overlap case from the Yakama (or Yakima) Indian Reservation in Washington state in the USA.⁵ The area may have been, and perhaps still is, a hot spot for strange events. Driving home on an unlit gravel road on the northern side of the Toppenish Ridge in December 1975, Jim Miller (pseudonym) saw a cow and two calves heading his way. He slowed down, and moments later saw three figures at the side of the road. In a 15-ft, slow-motion stride, one of them, about seven feet tall, bounded on to the road and slowly raised its arms above its



ABOVE: A view toward Toppenish Ridge and the Yakama Indian Reservation, where a witness saw a bizarre entity and a strange light, heard a woman's voice in his head and experienced a crisis apparition.

head. Feeling uneasy, Jim swerved around the entity and drove on. Not long after, an elongated, lighted object appeared behind his vehicle, blinking on and off several times. Shortly after, the inside of his truck and the area immediately around it were brightly illuminated. Jim noticed a shadow to his right and knew, intuitively, that it was the figure of a close friend. He recognised the shape of the latter's head and coat. Speeding on, he heard a woman's voice in his head, telling him to drive recklessly, because 'they' couldn't afford to be the cause of his getting hurt. The apparitional passenger turned his head to look at Jim, leant forward, and then looked up at the light coming through the windscreen. After leaning back and wiping its eyes, the figure leant forward, as if to get up, but then disappeared. The light vanished, and Jim felt that someone had died. The next morning, he learned that a friend, who resembled the ghostly figure in the truck, had been killed in a shooting incident the previous night.

Therefore, in addition to seeing humanoids and a UFO, Jim had apparently experienced what's known as a crisis apparition (an apparition depicting a person who underwent a crisis – e.g. a fatal incident – around the time that his or her ghostly form was seen). Jim was interviewed by researchers Bill Vogel and David Akers, and the latter subsequently reported to the astronomer and UFO researcher J Allen Hynek that he'd detected nothing to suggest deliberate

A ranch family saw two white-faced humanoids chasing cattle

fabrication or a desire for publicity on Jim's part. However, given the night-time conditions and the duration of the incident, Akers found it hard to account for the amount of descriptive detail. Interestingly, though, Long explains that some three months after Jim's experience, and about 10 miles away, a ranch family saw two tall, white-faced humanoid creatures chasing some of their cattle.

The hypothesised trickster may deliberately orchestrate phenomena to tease, bamboozle and cause dissension. It's perhaps unrealistic to expect UFOs to land on the White House lawn in the full gaze of the media, since that would validate the UFO phenomenon. An 'absurdity' factor might be intentionally built into the 'performances', perversely ensuring that witness testimony will be doubted or disputed. After all, many people tend to discount *any* stories of forteen phenomena, and might be particularly dismissive of bizarre reports involving manifestations from more than one traditional category.

Overlap cases may go unreported if witnesses fear that their testimony will be greeted with derision or incredulity. Therefore, I'd advise investigators to ask their informants, as a matter of course, whether they've had any anomalous experiences falling *outside* the investigation group's specific area of interest. If investigators have an excessively narrow focus ("We're into ghosts and poltergeists, mate – we don't do UFOs!"), they could miss the bigger picture.

SYNCHRONICITY

The term 'synchronicity' was coined by the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung (1875-1961). But in my view, he wasn't the clearest of writers or theorists. Therefore, I shan't try to outline his understanding of the concept (for more, see **FT171:42-47, 216:50-52**).

In modern usage, the word 'synchronicity' is applied to seemingly strange coincidences. An interesting example is cited by Christopher O'Brien, an American cattle mutilation researcher.⁶ For a period, he lived in the San Luis Valley, which runs from south central Colorado into northern New Mexico. It has a history of strange events, such as cattle mutilations and UFO sightings. O'Brien's experience occurred in 1993, after he'd spoken to members of a family called Sutherland about a bull of theirs that had been found dead and mutilated in June 1980. During the early evening of the day before the discovery, the Sutherlands heard a helicopter flying slowly south over their property. Then, 15-20 minutes later, they heard it again. They saw it rising from the pasture where the dead bull would be found the next morning. It was mustard-yellow, looked old-fashioned, and didn't seem to have any markings. The helicopter flew back to the north, over their house. They reportedly made extensive enquiries, but were unable to discover where it had come from. They were told that a helicopter of that type would be extremely rare and would be astronomically expensive to keep in the air. The day after visiting the Sutherlands (i.e. some 13 years after their seeing the helicopter), O'Brien was at home, reviewing and typing up his interview notes, when he heard, and then saw, a helicopter that matched what the Sutherlands had seen in 1980. There were other witnesses as well. In his 2009 book, he notes that ever since that experience, he's been absolutely convinced that there's "a trickster energy, or program, that is paranormal in nature and [that] somehow this energy/force/entity is manipulating coincidence and manufacturing synchronicity".

IS THE TRICKSTER A SADIST?

People caught up in paranormal activity often find their experiences perplexing and stressful. The phenomena might even impel them to leave their homes. Poltergeist outbreaks can entail property damage, and cattle mutilations obviously have financial implications for ranchers. People may suffer

long-term ill-health, or even die, as a result of close encounter UFO experiences.⁷ There are also reports of pilots disappearing after encountering UFOs, the best-known case being that of Frederick Valentich, who disappeared in a hired Cessna 182 aircraft off the south coast of Australia in 1978.⁸

After UFO sightings, witnesses are sometimes unable to account for passages of time. They might be haunted by vague feelings, flashbacks, and partial recollections; and they might discover marks, scars or apparent ‘implants’ that they hadn’t previously noticed. Over time, or with the aid of the controversial technique of hypnotic regression, they might recall abduction scenarios involving otherworldly entities. Accounts often feature medical examinations and reproductive procedures. Indeed, it’s been suggested that non-humans are systematically creating human-alien hybrids and using female abductees as incubators, perhaps as part of a programme aimed at taking over our planet. At any rate, irrespective of whether the reported abductions are physically real or paranormal, trickster-imposed experiences with an hallucinatory element, they’re usually distressing for the people involved. For many victims, the experiences are recurrent. Different generations within a family might be targeted. Thus, a woman with a history of terrifying abduction experiences might be dismayed to learn that her daughter is going through a similar ordeal.

Darren Ritson and Michael Hallowell suggest that the intelligence behind poltergeist manifestations might deliberately engender stress and fear, to enable it to ‘feed’.⁹ Of course, this notion can be extended to other types of frightening paranormal activity (encounters with black-eyed children, abductions by supposed aliens, apparitional hauntings, and so on). There may be some truth in it, but I find the notion of ‘feeding on fear’ hard to grasp, because fear and stress are mental/physiological *states*, not types of energy or physical substances. But if the trickster does indeed need to provoke fear in order to ‘feed’, its activity could be viewed as a survival strategy rather than an indication



that it takes a sadistic delight in causing suffering.

But the story isn’t entirely negative. For example, there have been claims of people being cured of cancer by aliens,¹⁰ and of bigfoot creatures acting benevolently towards humans.¹¹ If these reports are true, and if the supposed aliens and bigfoot are deemed to be manifestations of the trickster, it would be wrong to describe it as invariably malevolent. But could this ‘good-bad duality’ be part of a cynical, tricksterish game, aimed at preventing us from gaining a proper understanding of what we’re dealing with?

TOP: A contemporary news report of the disappearance of pilot Frederick Valentich. **LEFT:** The remains of a calf found on Manuel Sanchez’s ranch in the San Luis Valley. **BELOW:** US cattle mutilation researcher Chris O’Brien.

MESSAGES FROM THE DEAD?

When spiritualist mediums purport to pass on messages from the dead, they sometimes make surprisingly accurate pronouncements. In some instances, this may be attributable to prosaic factors, such as fishing for information and intelligent guesswork. But research suggests that some mediums do indeed acquire information by paranormal means. See, for example, the late David Fontana’s book, *Is There an Afterlife?*¹² However, the fact that mediums’ statements are sometimes uncannily accurate doesn’t necessarily mean that the information has come from the dead. A frequently raised alternative possibility, known as the ‘super-ESP theory’ or ‘super-psi theory’, is that, unwittingly, mediums have tapped into the memories of living people, via telepathy, or have obtained veridical information from elsewhere by extrasensory perception (ESP). However, it isn’t clear how such elaborate information-gathering could occur unconsciously. At any rate, Fontana disputes the super-ESP theory, contending that “we have no laboratory evidence that telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition can produce the amount and quality of information sometimes yielded through mediums”. Arguably, though, the notion of spirit communication itself amounts to a super-ESP theory, because it implies that the deceased have prodigious ESP powers. Imagine, for instance, that you’re at a public meeting and that a medium relays a message to you from your deceased grandfather, Bill. Now, how does Bill know that you’re at the meeting and that there’s a medium present? Has he been keeping tabs on you from the other side? Is he able to scan your diary and email



using clairvoyance, to somehow listen in to your conversations, or to read your mind telepathically? Or does he follow you about, like an obsessed and shadowy stalker? But that, too, would require ESP, since he would no longer have physical senses. And for Bill to communicate with you via the medium, he would need a telepathic link with the latter. As for Fontana's contention that there's no laboratory evidence that ESP can produce the amount and quality of information that mediums sometimes yield, it may be that formal, laboratory-based studies aren't the most conducive for eliciting ESP, particularly if the subjects are unselected student volunteers rather than people with a track record of exhibiting ESP.

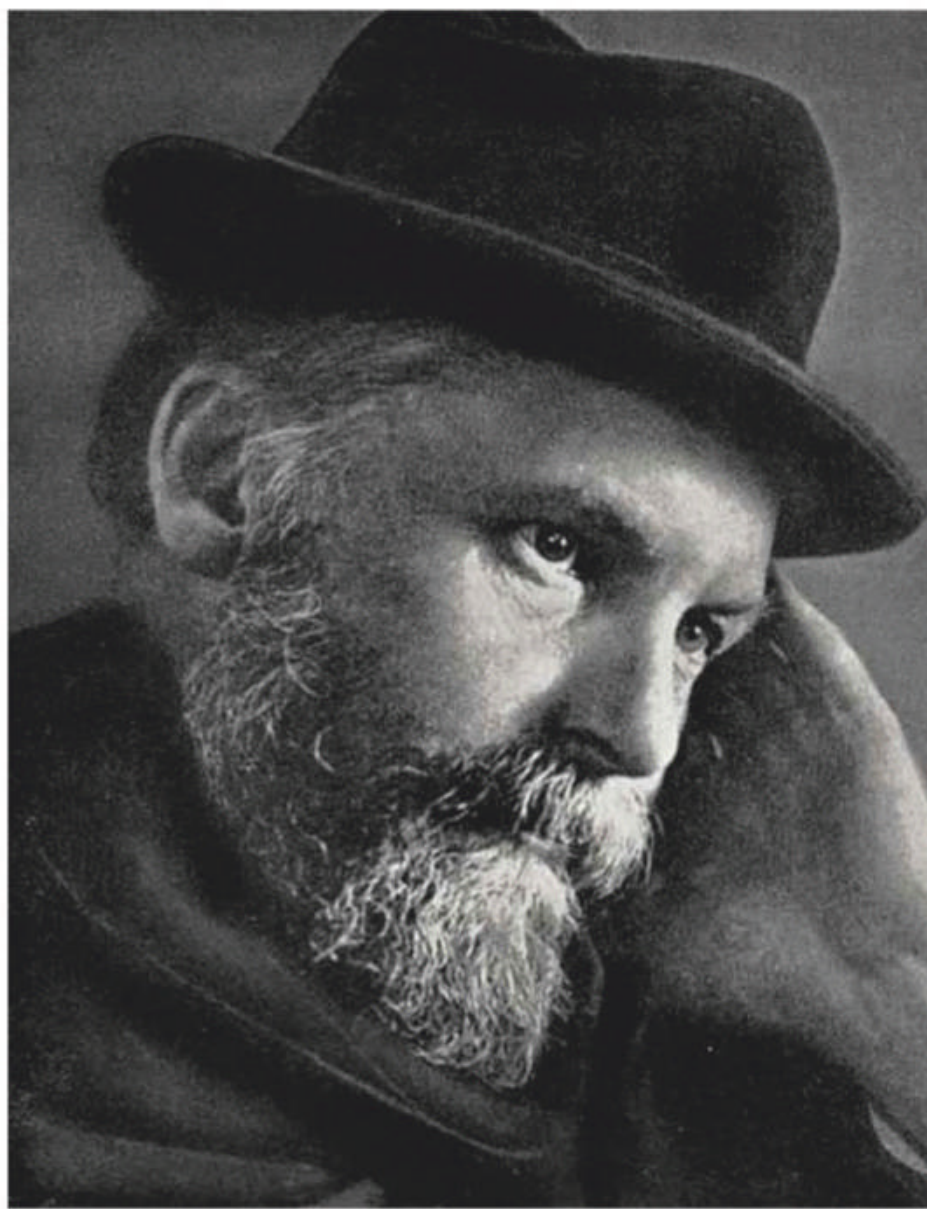
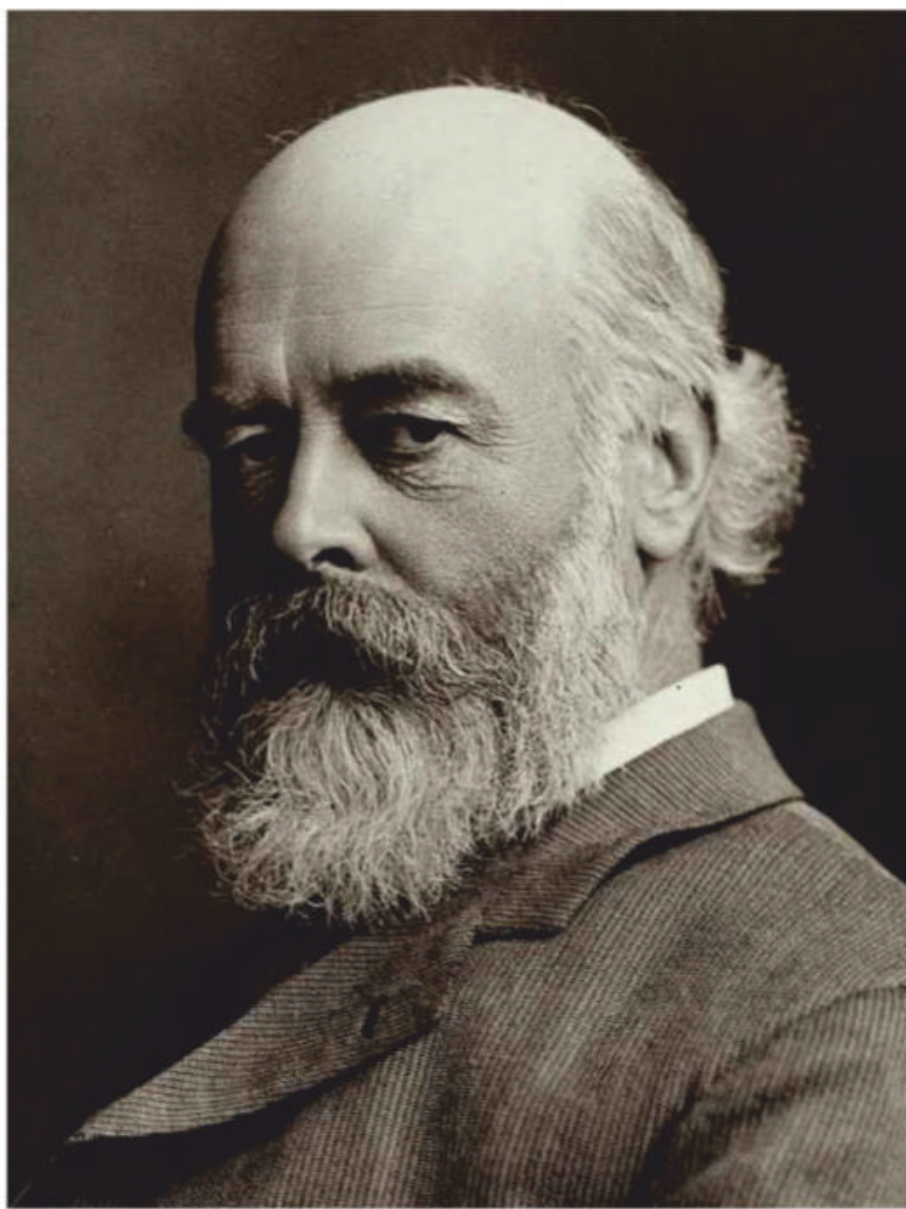
There are cases in which alleged spirit communicators have been unknown to the people present at a séance, but have provided verifiable information about the deceased individuals they've claimed to be. They've been referred to as 'drop-in communicators', and in such instances it would appear that the medium hasn't gleaned the information from any of the sitters by telepathy. Furthermore, it's hard to imagine how the medium could have obtained the information by clairvoyance. Indeed, in some drop-in cases, the confirmatory historical information has had to be pieced together from different sources. Fontana refers to the suggestion

that coherent information may exist in a cosmic memory bank, but he asserts that there's little evidence to support it. Therefore, at first sight, drop-in cases appear to support Fontana's contention that our consciousness survives bodily death, and that spirit communication is a reality. However, another possibility is that a manipulative and deceptive higher intelligence – the trickster – is at work. If so, information known by the trickster about a deceased person (Joe Bloggs, say) might be deliberately fed, telepathically, to a medium. The latter, and his or her sitters, might then be duped into thinking that the spirit of Joe Bloggs is communicating with them.

A series of communications known as the 'cross-correspondences' (see FT364:16-17) is often cited as providing some of the best evidence for survival.¹³ They

*It could be argued
that the trickster
was the source
of the messages*

spanned about three decades, from 1901, and came through various mediums and automatists¹⁴ – and they appeared to be part of a deliberate plan by the deceased communicators (including founder members of the Society for Psychical Research) to provide convincing evidence of their survival. The following (hypothetical) example gives an idea of how the cross-correspondences worked: Mary, an automatist in England, produces some writing referring to a mythical Greek hero. Sally, a medium in the USA, relays a cryptic message. Molly, in Wales, then produces some automatic writing, and researchers notice that it relates to, and makes sense of, the two previous communications. However, the evidential weight of the cross-correspondences has been challenged. Christopher Moreman reported a study in which correspondences, some quite startling, were found between passages chosen at random from literary works.¹⁵ At any rate, from the perspective of the trickster hypothesis, it could be argued that the source of the scripts and messages in the cross-correspondences was the trickster rather than discarnate humans anxious to demonstrate that they'd survived bodily death. Indeed, if we take the trickster hypothesis seriously, the only logical position to adopt on supposed evidence for survival is an agnostic one.



ABOVE: Oliver Lodge (left) and Frederick Myers (right) were key figures in the early days of psychical research, and both played major roles in the saga of the 'cross-correspondences'. Myers died in 1901 and numerous mediums relayed communications supposedly emanating from the deceased man's spirit.



LEFT: Slash-and-burn clearing of the Amazon rainforest to create grazing land for cattle farming; are cattle mutilations a manifestation of protest by the 'collective unconscious'?

THE TRICKSTER'S MOTIVES

If there's a unitary trickster intelligence behind a wide array of anomalous phenomena, is it essentially just a resourceful and perpetual prankster, or could it have higher motives? In his book entitled *UFOs & Nukes: Extraordinary Encounters at Nuclear Weapons Sites*, the American researcher Robert Hastings adduces a wealth of testimony linking UFO sightings with the production, testing, storage, and deployment of nuclear weapons.¹⁶ There are even reports of nuclear weapon systems malfunctioning when UFOs have been in their vicinity. These reports could indicate that the intelligence behind the manifestations has an interest in the harmful environmental effects, or potentially harmful effects, of human activity, and is perhaps hinting that it could intervene in a big way if we go too far. Alternatively, 'nuke'-related UFO incidents could simply be a matter of the trickster demonstrating that it can operate in any domain of its choosing.

Christopher O'Brien notes that the livestock sector is one of the most significant contributors to our global environmental problems.¹⁷ For example, he explains that 70 per cent of Amazon rainforest that succumbs to slashing and burning is used to expand pasturelands; and he refers to speculation that the mutilation phenomenon is somehow being manifested by the 'collective unconscious', perhaps as a warning to us. I'm not sure whether there is a collective unconscious, and I tend to think of the hypothesised trickster as being a higher intelligence rather than as a part of us. But either way, given the alarming rise in the world's population and the scale of environmental damage caused by humans, it seems that any such message has been pretty ineffective.

PROBLEMS WITH THE TRICKSTER HYPOTHESIS

Because it's rather sketchy, I've referred to the notion of a trickster or 'cosmic joker' as a *hypothesis*, not a theory. As noted, it helps make sense of overlap cases, which are hard, if not impossible, to explain satisfactorily in more traditional terms. However, it's unclear *how* the effects are produced. For example, I've posited that the trickster can induce hallucinations and tamper with people's memories, but I don't know *how* that could be done. But the trickster hypothesis is by no means alone in leaving much unexplained. For example, deeming that 'aliens' are extraterrestrial or 'interdimensional' doesn't, in itself, explain their reported telepathic abilities.

A more serious problem for the trickster hypothesis is that it's hard to see how it could be disproved if it's untrue. Imagine, for example, that the US government disclosed that it had a large collection of crashed spaceships in its possession, and also a large number of preserved corpses, and that these craft and beings were deemed to be of extraterrestrial origin. If the announcement were backed up with testimony from independent specialists, it would obviously lend support to the extraterrestrial hypothesis. However, a dogged defender of the trickster notion could argue that the mischievous intelligence had somehow fabricated the items to give a false impression that Earth is being visited by aliens.

Many would argue that if a hypothesis doesn't allow for a definitive test of its truth, it lies outside the domain of science. But it may be that UFO and paranormal manifestations are of a nature that will never fully yield to conventional science. If so, we may be unable to proceed beyond intelligent speculation.

For some rather different takes on the notion of the cosmic joker or trickster, see **FT175:40-41** and **185:53-55**.

NOTES

- 1** David Weatherly, *Strange Intruders*, Leprechaun Productions, 2016, p119.
 - 2** Richard M Dolan, *UFOs & the National Security State: The Cover-Up Exposed*, 1973-1991, Keyhole Publishing Company, 2009, pp121-124.
 - 3** www.ikaros.org/es/canen.htm
 - 4** Stan Gordon, *Silent Invasion: The Pennsylvania UFO-Bigfoot Casebook*, privately published, 2010.
 - 5** Greg Long, *Examining the Earthlight Theory: The Yakima UFO Microcosm*, The J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies, 1990, pp 56-59.
 - 6** O'Brien mentions the incident in at least three of his books: *Secrets of the Mysterious Valley* (2007, pp100-103), *Stalking the Tricksters* (2009, pp69-73), and *Stalking the Herd* (2014, pp292-294), all published by Adventures Unlimited Press.
 - 7** See, for example, the late Bob Pratt's book *UFO Danger Zone: Terror and Death in Brazil – Where Next?*, Horus House Press, 1996.
 - 8** Richard F Haines, *Melbourne Episode: Case Study of a Missing Pilot*, LDA Press, 1987; Richard F Haines & Paul Norman, "Valentich disappearance: New evidence and a new conclusion", *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2000, pp19-33.
 - 9** Darren W Ritson & Michael J Hallowell, *Contagion: In the Shadow of the South Shields Poltergeist*, Limbury Press, 2014, pp198-199.
 - 10** O'Brien, op. cit., 2007, pp 97-98. See also Peter A McCue, *Zones of Strangeness: An Examination of Paranormal and UFO Hot Spots*, AuthorHouse, 2012, pp 452-457.
 - 11** Thom Powell, *The Locals: A Contemporary Investigation of the Bigfoot/Sasquatch Phenomenon*, Hancock House Publishers, 2003, pp145-146; pp. 156-160.
 - 12** David Fontana, *Is There an Afterlife?*, O Books, 2005.
 - 13** See, for example, Fontana, op. cit., pp175-185.
 - 14** Automatists are people who produce automatic writing, in which the hand holding a pen or pencil moves of its own volition, and usually without the automatist's knowing what's being written.
 - 15** Christopher M Moreman, "A re-examination of the possibility of chance coincidence as an alternative explanation for mediumistic communication in the cross-correspondences", *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, vol. 67.4, 2003, pp225-242.
 - 16** Second edition, privately published, 2017.
 - 17** O'Brien, op. cit., 2007.
- ◆ **DR PETER McCUE** is a retired clinical psychologist with a longstanding interest in fortean phenomena. He has contributed previous articles to FT, and is the author of two books: *Zones of Strangeness: An Examination of Paranormal and UFO Hot Spots* (AuthorHouse, 2012) and *Paranormal Encounters on Britain's Roads: Phantom Figures, UFOs and Missing Time* (History Press, 2018). He is currently working on a book on anomalous experiences in British woodland.

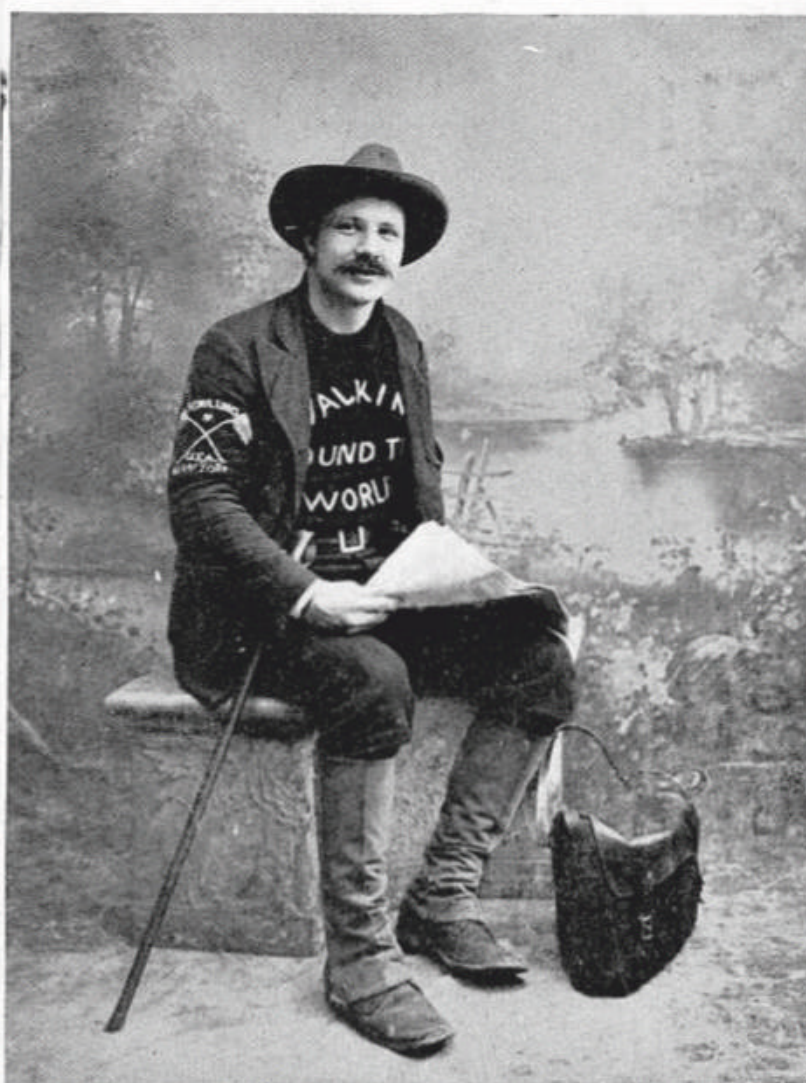
WALKING AROUND THE WORLD: FROM THE ANNALS OF HUMAN HYPERPEDESTRIANISM

In the late 19th and early 20th century, a large number of individuals were apparently seized by a strange compulsion to walk around the world for a wager – sometimes with babies, barrels and canine companions in tow. **JAN BONDESON** presents an illustrated selection of some of history's oddest globe-trotters and their often doomed journeys...

George Matthew Schilling was born in Pittsburgh in June 1874, son of the German American master mechanic Michael Schilling. In 1883, when he was nine years old, his left arm was torn off at the shoulder after he had got caught in machinery in a Pittsburgh axe factory. Undeterred by this, he became something of an athlete as a teenager, diving into rivers from tall bridges just for the fun of it, and specialising in long-distance walking. He first gained notoriety as a pedestrian by walking 1,000 miles in 21 days, and subsequently won a wager for \$5,000 by walking from Pittsburgh to San Francisco and back – a distance of 8,900 miles – in nine months and 28 days. In between his walking stunts, he worked as a mechanic in his own workshop.

On 3 August 1897, George M Schilling left New York for his most ambitious walking feat yet: he was to walk around the world in four years, for a wager of \$5,000 with the boxing promoter and theatrical company director 'Parson' Davies. He left New York dressed in a suit made of newspapers, accompanied only by his faithful foxhound cross 'King II'. It was stipulated that he would leave with no money, and not be allowed to beg, borrow or spend; he should also return to New York within four years' time, having earned \$5,000 in cash on his travels by giving lectures and so forth. In spite of these harsh stipulations, Schilling told a journalist that he felt quite confident of winning his wager.

Schilling attracted much attention when he walked out of New York, dressed in his newspaper suit. Friendly Americans gave him money, and one of them paid for a



GEORGE M. SCHILLING,
FAMOUS AMERICAN ATHLETE.
WHO HAS WALKED ROUND THE WORLD FOR A WAGER,
and has walked 55,000 miles since August, 1897, having left New York in a newspaper suit and penniless, the only man living who has accomplished this extraordinary feat.

LEFT: George M Schilling takes a break after his walk around the world.

comfortable suit of clothes suitable for walking. Schilling tramped from New York to Chicago, then on to St Louis, and through the Plains and Rocky Mountains to reach Mexico and Southern California. In the Great American Desert he met with difficulties, although supplied with food and water by some soldiers, and given rice and stew by friendly Chinese navvies. He followed the railway, eating various unpalatable dishes donated by the Chinese, but he suffered very much from the heat, and his dog was fast petering out. Reaching the town of Elko, his shoes were worn out, and he had not eaten for two days. Two railway travellers gave him breakfast and some money, but he could not get hold of a new pair of shoes. Footsore and bedraggled, he struggled on to San Francisco, where he tried to get a berth on a ship for Australia. The mariners would not allow the dog on board, however. Schilling did not want to part company with King II, who had saved him from hostile Indians on several occasions during his travels in Mexico, so he tramped 400 miles to Vancouver, where he got aboard a sailing vessel bound for Sydney, working his passage before the mast.

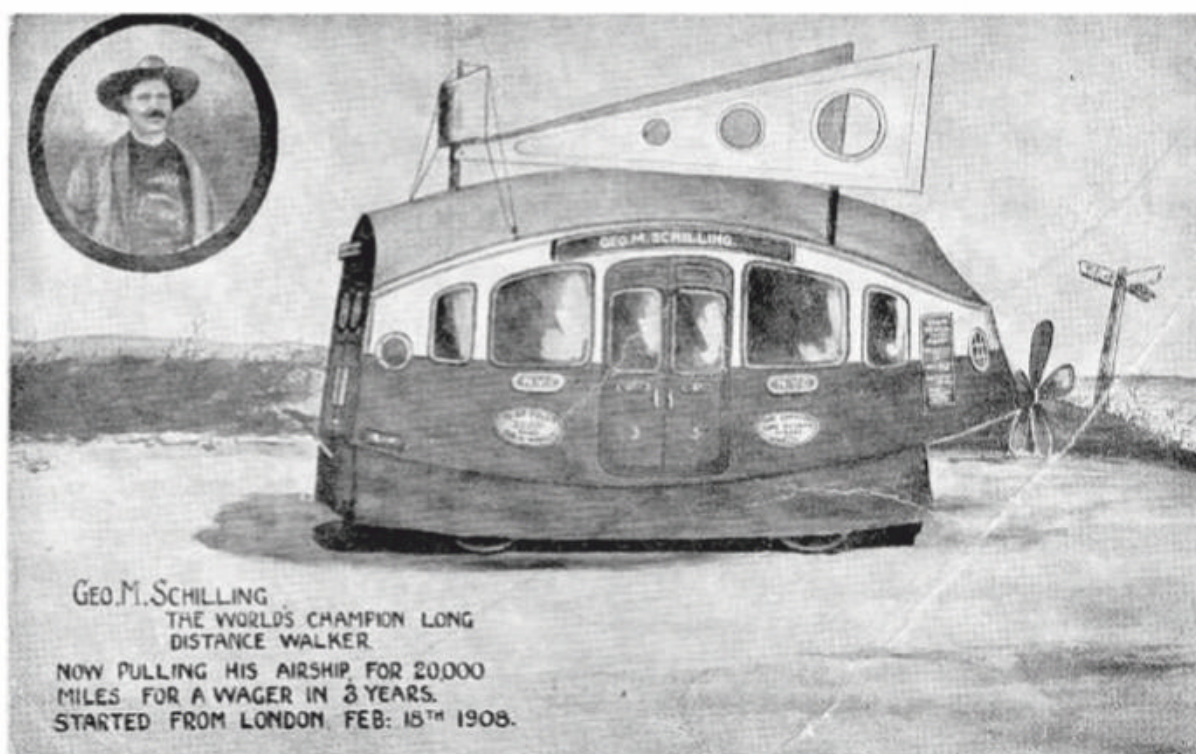
In Sydney, King II was seized by the authorities and placed in a quarantine for six months. During this time, Schilling walked through Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand. In the larger towns and cities en route, he gave lectures about his adventures on the tramp. A tall, powerful man with a bronzed and sunburnt face, he sold postcards with his picture, and a pamphlet describing his experiences this far. He brought with him a large ledger,

*He was to walk
around the world
in four years for a
wager of \$5,000*

which was to be sealed and signed in all the towns he had visited, to obtain proof of his tour round the world. In spite of all the hardships on his perilous tramp across the American continent, braving deserts, storms and snow, he had gained 2lb in weight since leaving New York. In New Zealand, he joined forces with a travelling variety company of actors and singers in December 1898, and shared the stage with them on many occasions. He was still in New Zealand in April 1899, before returning to Australia. In Auckland, he doubled back to Sydney, picked up his dog, and went on to tour Western and Southern Australia for several months, giving lectures, selling postcards, and collecting seals and signatures in his ledger.

In August 1900, Schilling and King II arrived in Colombo, Ceylon. He walked on to Kandy and Calcutta, and crossed India to Bombay, where the dog expired in some unspecified sub-continental calamity. Schilling went on to Rangoon and Singapore, reaching Hong Kong in March 1901. He walked to Shanghai, and hoped to walk through China, but this was not possible due to the Boxer Uprising. Instead, he went to Japan, landing in Nagasaki and then reaching Kobe in May 1901. Due to this wartime disturbance to his walking schedule, 'Parson' Davies allowed him an additional year to complete his world tour. Schilling went on to the Philippines, Java and Sumatra.

In October 1901, we find him in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, where he could see the ending of the Boer War first hand. He walked on to East London and Johannesburg, before going on to Rhodesia. At this time, there was a sudden and suspicious cessation of newspaper reporting of his activities. In January 1905, a South African paper reported that the skeleton of a man had been found nine miles north of Puff Adder, in the district of Preiska; lying close by were papers giving the name GM Schilling, and a map of South Africa. Had the great pedestrian lost his life? No, certainly not! The *Virginia Enterprise*



ABOVE: A postcard showing George M Schilling "the World's Long Distance Walker" and his airship.
BELOW: Another postcard, this time showing Schilling with his dog King III and his giant globe.

newspaper responded: Schilling had arrived in Berlin in August 1904, and was now on his way to Britain. He later explained this African hiatus by pointing out the great difficulties in proceeding north through Uganda, and the great deserts to the north. Furthermore, he had been arrested as a spy by the Turks, who did not believe in his story about walking round the world for a wager, and held in prison for several months. His wager was now irrevocably lost.

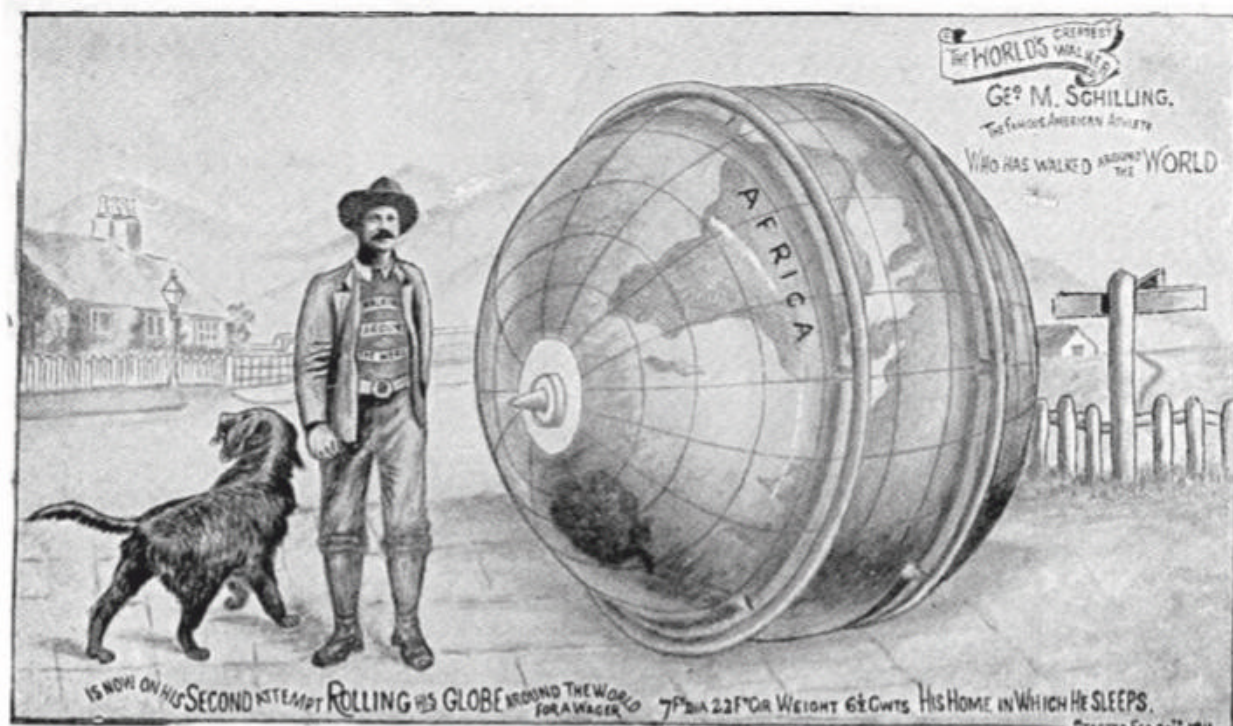
Nevertheless, the determined Schilling kept tramping on. He reached London in November 1904, and in early January we find him lecturing in Gloucester, on his way from Bristol to Worcester. He then walked on to the north, giving a series of lectures in Hull to great acclaim, describing his perilous journey around the world. In Hull, the 30-year-old globetrotter met the 23-year-old draper's assistant Ellen May Matthews, a pretty girl who was the daughter of a respectable Hull butcher, and he fell in love with her on first sight. After a whirlwind

romance, he married her in Newcastle on 1 March 1905. Unconventionally, the bride wore black, but the jolly Schilling was dressed in his usual walking costume, with 'Walking round the world' inscribed in large letters on the front of his jersey. On the marriage certificate, he described himself as an athlete and lecturer. He told a journalist that although he had lost his wager, he had gained a bride; now, he intended to walk through Scotland and Ireland, before ending his tour of the world in Liverpool.

He did not return to Pittsburgh, but remained in Britain for some time. He continued to sell his postcards, advertising various unrealistic future walking stunts. In 1908, he wanted to pull a small airship for 20,000 miles in three years. In 1911, he announced his intention to roll a large globe, inside which he would sleep at night, around the world for a wager, accompanied by his large black mongrel dog King III. There is nothing to suggest that either of these expansive projects ever came to fruition, but until the end of his life, Schilling boasted that he was the first man who had ever walked around the world. He left Britain for the United States in or around 1914, and died there in May 1920, aged just 46, leaving a widow and several children; he is said to have great-grandchildren alive today.

RIPPER SUSPECT TO GLOBETROTTER

George M Schilling was by far the most successful of early would-be globetrotters, although he was not the first of them. In June 1893, the American pedestrians Fred Thoerner and Gus Koegel had walked out of San Francisco on a tramp around the world; in April the year after, they are recorded to have come walking into Monte Carlo. Another German American, Sid Stupp, joined them in Munich, and after Thoerner fell ill in Bucharest, Stupp and Koegel left





ABOVE LEFT: Mr and Mrs George O'Malley, who left San Francisco in October 1897 to walk around the world, from a postcard stamped and posted in Germany on 30 April 1900. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The two *Distanz-Fassroller*, active in 1900. **BELOW:** H de Graaf and M. and Mme Saeys, the Dutch globe-trotters, and their dog.

him behind and proceeded through the Middle East on their way to India. In March 1896, they were still on the road, but there is nothing to indicate that their walk was completed as planned. In January 1894, the Russian journalist Michel Debernoff, the son of General Debernoff, who had started an ambitious walking tour around the world, arrived in Gibraltar from Cadiz. He had already visited the principal capitals of Europe, and was now on his way to Africa.

The wonderfully named Percy Beresford Greathead was born in Milford, Hampshire, in June 1862, the son of a gentleman. He had quite an adventurous past. In 1891, after several weeks' hard drinking in London, he wanted to see the East End slums made famous by Jack the Ripper. Skulking out of his lodgings late at night, he armed himself with a loaded revolver and a large Bowie knife, in case Jack was still at large. When he passed some prostitutes, one of them called out "Is that Jack the Ripper?" and another said "Now, then, bighead, it is time you were in bed!" Greathead whipped out his revolver and aimed at her face, saying that if she was talking to him in such terms of disrespect, he would shoot her! The prostitute, the young Irishwoman Margaret Sweeney, screamed "Here's Jack the Ripper!" and there was a great uproar in the neighbourhood. Rumours were flying that the Whitechapel Fiend had finally been tracked down. Greathead was arrested by a police constable and brought before the Worship Street Police Court. Although just 29 years old, he had been a heavy drinker

He armed himself with a revolver in case the Ripper was still at large



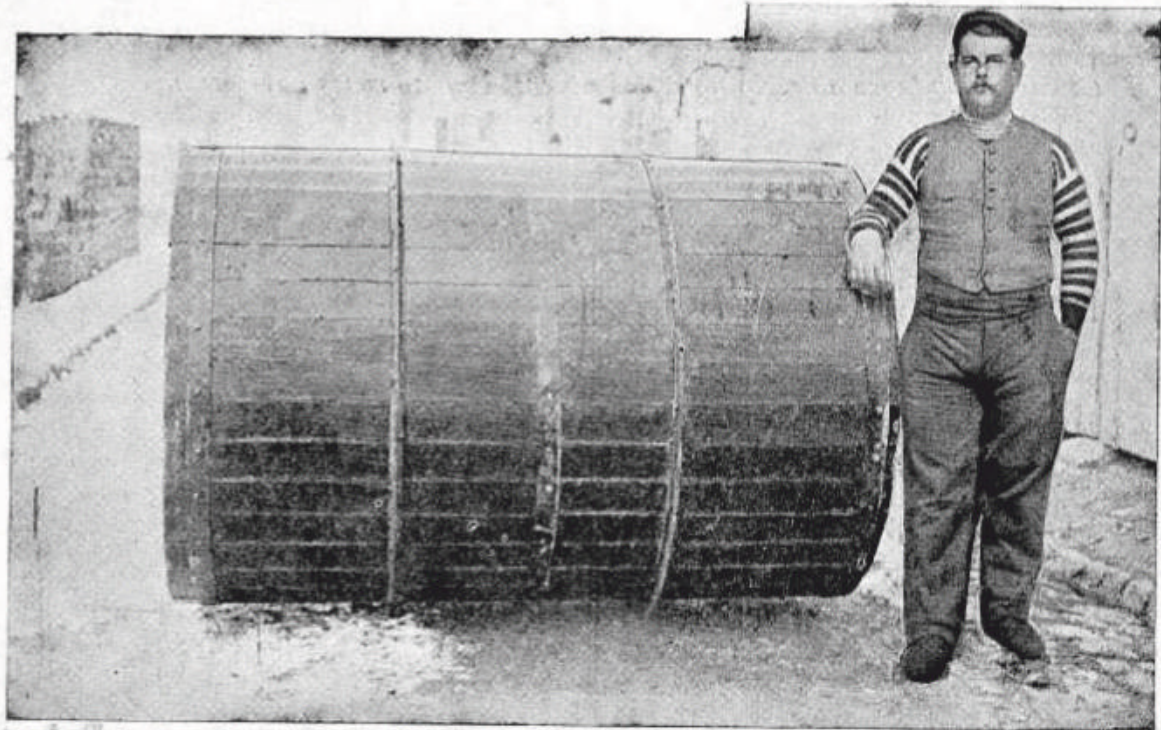
for some time, and was without occupation. When drunk, his habits were extremely rowdy, and he had more than once fired his revolver more or less at random. In the end, he was ordered to find two sureties of £200 each, and give his own bail for £400 for his good behaviour for 12 months.

After his narrow escape in the 1891 'Ripper' scare, Greathead emigrated to Canada. He led a more wholesome life there, and no longer drank to excess. In 1895, two clubs in Vancouver wagered \$50,000 on whether a man could walk around the world in five years without money or luggage. Greathead offered his services, and walked out of Vancouver in August 1895, carrying only a small bag and a loaded rifle. He walked across the American continent, sleeping rough and subsisting on wild game he shot with his rifle. In January 1897, he arrived in Liverpool as a passenger on the Allan liner *Numidian* from New York. After his foot had been run over by a carriage in March of the same year, he was forced to recuperate in hospital for several months. He then walked north to Aberdeen and Inverness, touring Scotland before returning to London on a train. He then set out for Gloucester, where he told a journalist that he had worn out 19 pairs of boots, before touring Wales, Dorset, Devon and Cornwall in November and December 1898. He made it to Europe, walking through Holland, Switzerland, Italy, Austria and Romania. In Manchuria, he was arrested as a spy, and detained for two months until he escaped. Just like George

M Schilling, he was dismayed by the Chinese troubles, and instead of walking on through the Middle East and India, he returned to Le Havre by train, arriving in Southampton in November 1901. He once more toured Britain, lecturing about his travelling exploits and assuring his audiences that if it had not been for the restless and hostile Orientals, he would have won his great wager. Since he has successfully dodged the Internet genealogists, no clue remains as to his ultimate fate.

The publicity enjoyed by Schilling and Greathead persuaded quite a few other people to set out on walking tours around the world. For a wager of \$2,000, the young New Zealander Harry Carter left Wellington in 1902, dressed, like Schilling, in a suit made of newspapers; he is recorded to have reached London in March 1906, on his way to Holland and Denmark. The globetrotting couple Mr and Mrs George O'Malley left San Francisco in October 1897, and were in Berlin in late 1900.

The Croatian adventurer Joseph Mikulec set out from Austria in February 1906, walking through Europe and taking a ship from Portugal to Cape Town, and then across the Atlantic to South America. He wanted to cross the Andes into Chile, but was deterred by the extreme cold. In Brazil, he was twice robbed by highwaymen, and tormented by the mosquitoes, before leaving as a deckhand on board a steamer for Philadelphia. He walked across the entire American continent, collecting autographs of famous people for a large ledger he carried with him. Mikulec liked the United States, and became an American citizen. His original plan had been to set out from Portland to Australia, and then proceed to Japan and China, before walking through Russia from Siberia to St Petersburg. There is nothing to suggest that this ambitious plan was acted upon, however, although Mikulec took part in various American walking stunts well into the 1920s. His great ledger, said to contain 30,000 autographs, was lost after his death.



ABOVE: The barrel-trundling Frenchman 'Goulet le Portefaix'. **BELOW:** JG Elsenhans, the German barrel-roller. **BOTTOM:** The dog-loving Italians Zanardi and Vianello trundling their barrel around the world.



ROLL OUT THE BARREL

Some of the early globetrotters made a habit of rolling a large barrel along as they walked. In 1900, the two *Distanz-Fassroller* rolled a barrel from Vienna to Paris. In France, two rustic-looking types, who called themselves 'Goulet le Portefaix' and 'Baruet le Déménageur', amused themselves with various barrel-trundling stunts, although there is nothing to suggest that either of them left their native land. The German JG Elsenhans issued a postcard claiming to be on his way from Rome to the World Exhibition in St Louis, Missouri, pulling a barrel behind him with a rope. In July 1909, the two Italians Attilio Zanardi and Eugenio Vianello left Venice wheeling a large barrel, on a tour around the world for a wager of \$30,000. Slowly but steadily, they passed through Switzerland, France, Holland and Belgium, arriving in Berlin on 18 May 1910. They had brought with them two dogs, both of which succumbed to their exertions on the road, but in Switzerland they had got hold of a St Bernard puppy, which was put inside the barrel if tired by the two dog-loving Italians. They were now setting out for Russia, Siberia and Asia, they announced, but there is nothing to suggest they ever made it there.

In 1908, the Touring Club de France announced a contest for walking around the world, with a prize of 100,000 francs. There was immediate enthusiasm from the Gallic tribe, and a number of jolly-looking pedestrians set off on their journeys, walking their dogs, playing their mandolins, and selling postcards along the way; most of them did not even get out of the country before becoming footsore and homesick, and longing for a comfortable train to take them back to civilisation. Four Romanian students in Paris also heard of the prize, and decided to take part: Dumitru Dan,



GLOBE-TROTTER

Record

International de la marche
n'ayant pour ressource
que la vente de sa carte
photographique

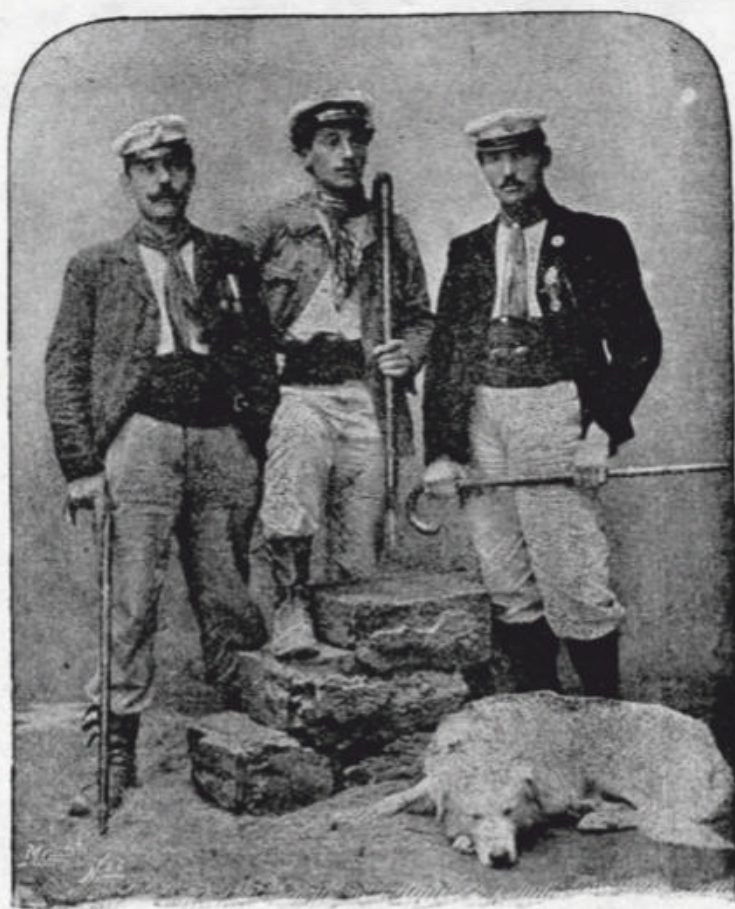
Tour du monde en cinq ans, a visité les cinq parties du monde, il ne lui reste plus qu'à parcourir une partie de la France.

Avec les
-contrôles les
plus sérieux.

Il aura
couvert 52.500
kilomètres.



EXPÉDITION "GLOBE-TROTTERS",
TOUR DU MONDE A PIED EN SEPT ANS



V. CASALI G. FRANCIOLINI G. LANZI



Souvenir du Globe Tretter LAGNEAUX
faisant le Tour du Monde à Pied avec sa Famille

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Jean Terrat, the French globe-trotter, and his dog; a musical Belgian married couple on their way around the world; Casali, Franciolini and Lanzi, the Italian hyperpedestrians, and their dog; M. and Mme Lagneaux, the married French walkers, with their three children and mandatory dog.



ABOVE LEFT: Dumitru Dan and Paul Pârvu; their two colleagues had already died, and only Dan completed the journey they had started in 1910 as a quartet. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The three uniformed Austrian globe-trotters, Gusty, Chapka and Dorina.

Paul Pârvu, Georg Negreanu and Alexandru Pascu. They went back to their native land and underwent a rigorous period of training before setting off, carrying musical instruments and wearing traditional garb, in early 1910. Following hyperpedestrian tradition, they brought with them a dog named Harap. In July 1911, they had reached Bombay, where they were invited by the local Rajah to tell of their adventures. When Pascu was invited to smoke some opium, he overdid it and died from opium poisoning. The other three pedestrians went on to China, where Negreanu fell down a precipice and died. The remaining two walked through Alaska, and down through the United States. In Jacksonville, Florida, Pârvu developed gangrene of the feet, and was left behind with the dog Harap for company; both his legs were amputated and he died in May 1915. The sole survivor of the Romanian walking party, Dumitru Dan, kept a low profile during the Great War, but he walked off again in 1919, and is said to have completed his journey in 1923.

The *New York Times* tells us that Mr and Mrs Harry Humphries, who had set out for a walk around the world from New York in July 1911, had reached London in November the same year. The Canadian newsboy 'Pittsie' Ryan had set out from Edmonton, Alberta, for a walk round the

world with seven other newsboys; in July 1914, he was the only one of them still on the road, reaching Paris after walking 40,000 miles in two and a half years. The Great War put an end to these silly walking stunts, on both sides of the Atlantic; walking round the world for a wager had lost its novelty and attraction, for good, and the 1920s and 1930s saw very little in the way of hyperpedestrianism.

According to established history, the first person to walk around the world under controlled circumstances was the American Dave Kunst, from 1970 until 1974. His feat was equalled by another American, Steven M Newman, from 1983 until 1987. Do any of the historical hyperpedestrians mentioned here have a claim to a precedent? The Masked Walker (who we will meet in a future issue) was a hoaxer who never left England, Joseph Mikulec never seems to have made it to Africa or Asia, and Beresford Greathead had to admit defeat in Manchuria. This leaves the original hyperpedestrian, George M Schilling, who was on the road from 1897 until 1905, and Dumitru Dan, who took from 1910 until 1923 to complete his feat. Schilling's progress through America, Australia, New Zealand and Asia was regularly reported in the newspapers, although he never seems to have been able to enter China, due to

anti-Western feeling. Then there was an unexplained hiatus from October 1901, when he was recorded to have been in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, and August 1904, when he walked into Berlin. Did Schilling stay in South Africa longer than he was willing to admit, did the unwholesome African climate stop the intrepid traveller in his tracks, or was there any truth to his story about being arrested as a spy in Turkey? It is unfortunate indeed that the large book where Schilling recorded the progress of his walk does not seem to have survived; it is said, by an alleged descendant of his, to have been lost in a fire. Dumitru Dan also has a claim to have completed his walk around the world, although parts of his journey also remain unverified, particularly the final leg of it, after the Great War.



This is an extra-illustrated extract from Jan Bondeson's book *The Lion Boy and Other Medical Curiosities*, available from Amberley Publishing, RRP £14.99.

♦ **JAN BONDESON** is a senior lecturer at Cardiff University, and a regular contributor to *FT*. His latest books are *The Lion Boy and Other Medical Curiosities* and *Phillimore's Edinburgh*, both from Amberley Publishing.

THE CASE OF THE DECAPITATED UNICORN

What was the identity of the mystery beast killed in South Africa and sent back to England in 1821? Another cryptozoological conundrum resurrected and resolved by **KARL SHUKER**

“One thing I’ve come particularly to admire about Karl over the years is his dogged persistence in following up a promising cryptozoological tid-bit or intriguing clue in the hopes that it will yield up something more substantial further down the line. Even when the trail goes cold, Karl will wait until a new lead emerges – whether from a fresh piece of witness testimony, a letter from one of his many correspondents or a bit of evidence turned up in a forgotten book or archive.”

(FT’s editor David Sutton, in his foreword to my book *Karl Shuker’s Alien Zoo*, published in 2010, a compilation of many of my columns and other cryptozoological writings that have appeared in FT.)

From my earliest days, I have been blessed (or cursed?) with an insatiable fascination for the obscure, the overlooked, and the downright outlandish in natural history – or unnatural history, as I dub those anomalous cases that are of particular interest to me. And in his above-quoted words, David Sutton has summarised all of this succinctly and astutely, because for me there is nothing more exciting in cryptozoological research than serendipitously encountering in some obscure source a tantalising line or two concerning a mysterious creature not only unknown to me but which, upon preliminary investigation, appears to have left no further trace in public history and is undocumented in the cryptozoological literature. When faced with such a case, I always bring to mind those famous Shakespeare-purloined words of Sherlock Holmes so often spoken with keen delight to Dr Watson upon finding himself in a similar situation: “The game is afoot!”

Furthermore, just as Holmes could call upon Watson, not to mention his equally loyal gang of Baker Street Irregulars, to assist him, so too have I been equally fortunate to be able to call upon a veritable army of Watsons and BSIs in my own investigations – namely, those steadfast devotees of my long-running Alien Zoo column in FT (now in its 21st



“An animal resembling the unicorn is on its way from Africa”

consecutive year). And so it was with the case featuring in this present article, once again previously undocumented, unexamined, and unsolved within the cryptozoological world.

A UNICORN FROM AFRICA

As is so often true with cases like this, it all began by chance, while surfing online during the evening of 27 June 2017. After my initial investigation failed to uncover any additional information, I sought assistance via a short item in one of my columns (FT356:25, Aug 2017). Here is what I wrote:

While browsing through Vol. 9 (April–October 1821) of a British periodical entitled *The Atheneum*; or, *Spirit of the English*

LEFT: A virgin and a unicorn. FACING PAGE: The colour drawing of the creature’s head, from Rev John Campbell’s *Travels in South Africa* (1822).

Magazines... I chanced upon a short but fascinating report of a reputed unicorn that had lately been sent to Britain, possibly while still alive, but which I’d never read about anywhere else before:

‘THE UNICORN.

‘Another animal resembling the description of the unicorn, as given by Pliny, is now on its way to this country from Africa; it nearly resembles the horse in figure, but is much smaller, and the single horn projecting from the fore head is considerably shorter than is given in the real or supposed delineations of that doubtful creature.’

What could this very intriguing creature have been? Bearing in mind that it was entirely unknown to me, whatever it was had evidently failed to excite the media once it did arrive in Britain, and yet its description matches nothing familiar to me from Africa. The fact that it was horselike and bore its single horn upon its brow would seem, if reported correctly, to eliminate a young rhinoceros. For both African species (black rhino and white rhino) have two horns each, but with neither one borne upon the brow, and even as calves they are burly in form, not remotely equine. Might it therefore have been a freak specimen of some antelope species, in which a single central horn had developed instead of the normal pair of lateral horns? Occasional ‘unicorn’ specimens of goats, sheep, and even deer have been confirmed, so this would not be impossible.

Moreover, certain African antelopes are superficially horselike. Indeed, one in particular, the roan antelope, is sufficiently so for it to have been given the formal binomial name *Hippotragus equinus* (‘horse horse-goat’). Equally ambiguous is the state in which this mystery beast was sent to Britain from Africa, because the report



Campbell del.

Clark sculp.

Head of a Unicorn, killed near the City of Mashow.

London Missionary Society and, in the opinion of scientific men, it is pronounced to be that of the unicorn so long sought after.

CONFUSING ACCOUNTS

Reading these newspaper reports, and the *Atheneum* account, it is only too clear that there is considerable confusion and some notable descriptive discrepancies in relation to the nature of the animal shot by Campbell's men.

According to the *Atheneum* report, this creature "nearly resembles the horse in figure, but is much smaller", and its "single horn", said to project from its forehead, "is considerably shorter" than that which is normally ascribed to the legendary unicorn. Yet in the *Caledonian Mercury* report, its horn alone, which again was said to project from the forehead (but now with a much smaller second one behind it), was claimed to have been 3ft (90cm) long, which would be disproportionately lengthy (and therefore highly cumbersome and unwieldy) if the animal were "much smaller" than a horse. And indeed, in the *Caledonian Mercury* report, the creature was stated by Rev Campbell to have been "much larger" than any of the seven rhinoceroses shot by his men earlier.

The creature itself was specifically referred to by Campbell as a rhinoceros, yet there is no known species of rhinoceros that typically possesses a brow-borne horn of any shape or form, let alone one that is 3ft long (and even has a second, smaller one positioned behind it). And throughout the *Cheltenham Chronicle's* report, a clear distinction is made between rhinoceroses and the creature killed by Campbell's man, which was identified unequivocally in this report by unnamed "scientific men" as the biblical unicorn, and thereby supplanted longstanding belief that

the latter beast was a rhinoceros. (In fact, the biblical unicorn, or re'em, is nowadays popularly deemed to have been the then still-surviving aurochs or European wild ox *Bos primigenius*, which became extinct in 1627, but that is another story!)

Faced with such a mass of contradictions and controversies, it seemed as if the only way in which this mystery might ever be resolved would be to determine whether the creature's principal horn still existed and, if so, gain sight of it. However, information present in the two newspaper reports suggested an alternative line of investigation, one that could be instigated straight away, and which proved to be successful. When I researched the biography of Rev John Campbell, who was responsible for the so-called unicorn's procurement, I discovered that he had documented his second visit to the Cape in a travel memoir entitled *Travels in South Africa... Being a Narrative of a Second Journey to the Interior of That Country*. Volume 1 was published in 1822, but a copy was readily accessible online. Within a few moments, the very curious case of Mashow's beheaded unicorn was a mystery no longer.

In an entry for 19 May 1820, Campbell provided his own, first-hand account concerning the killing of this 'unicorn' and its morphological appearance. His account differs from the versions in the two above-quoted newspaper reports, and shows the *Atheneum* account in particular to be woefully ill informed:

During our absence from Mashow two rhinoceroses came into the town during the night, when the inhabitants assembled and killed them both. The rhinoceroses... having been cut up, were brought, the one in a waggon, the other on pack-oxen... They brought also the head of one of them, which was different

from all the others that had been killed. The common African rhinoceros has a crooked horn resembling a cock's spur, which rises about nine or ten inches above the nose and inclines backward; immediately behind this is a short thick horn; but the head they brought had a straight horn projecting three feet from the forehead, about ten inches above the tip of the nose. The projection of this great horn very much resembles that of the fanciful unicorn in the British arms. It has a small thick horny substance, eight inches long, immediately behind it, which can hardly be observed on the animal at the distance of a hundred yards, and seems to be designed for keeping fast that which is penetrated by the long horn; so that this species of rhinoceros must appear really like a unicorn when running in the field. The head resembled in size a nine-gallon cask, and measured three feet from the mouth to the ear, and being much larger than that of the one with the crooked horn, and which measured eleven feet in length, the animal itself must have been still larger and more formidable. From its weight, and the position of the horn, it appears capable of overcoming any creature hitherto known. Hardly any of the natives took the smallest notice of the head, but treated it as a thing familiar to them. As the entire horn is perfectly solid, the natives, I afterwards heard, make from one horn four handles for their battle-axes. Our people wounded another, which they reported to be much larger.

Appended to Campbell's account was the following footnote penned by him, confirming the subsequent destination of the head (including its still-attached principal horn and diminutive second horn):

The head being so weighty; and the distance to the Cape so great, it appeared necessary to cut off the under jaw and leave it behind... The animal is considered by naturalists, since the



ABOVE RIGHT: 'The Reverend J Campbell's Method of Travelling in South Africa', an American engraving of 1837.

arrival of the skull in London, to be the unicorn of the ancients, and the same as that which is described in the xxxixth chapter of the book of Job. The part of the head brought to London, may be seen at the Missionary Museum; and, for such as may not have the opportunity of seeing the head itself, the annexed drawing of it has been made.

Also worth recalling here is a second footnote, this time appended to a concise summary of Campbell's 'unicorn' incident that appeared in an extensive biography of Campbell written by Robert Philip, entitled *The Life, Times and Missionary Enterprises of the Rev. John Campbell*, and published in 1841. This second footnote mentioned that one notable scientific figure holding the view that this creature was indeed the identity of the biblical unicorn described in the book of Job had been Sir Everard Home FRS (1756-1832). He was a British surgeon and prolific author on animal anatomy, who had written an essay about the creature, which he had read to the Royal Society. I also have on file the concise summary of Campbell's account from his book that appeared in issue #362 of the *Monthly Magazine*, published on 1 January 1822.

As for the oft-cited biblical unicorn account contained in verses 9-12 from the 39th chapter of the Book of Job (which evidently refers to a very powerful animal, yet provides no descriptive information concerning any aspect of its actual form, not even its celebrated horn), here it is:

Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib? Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? or will he harrow the valleys after thee? Wilt thou trust him, because his strength is great? or wilt thou leave thy labour to him? Wilt thou believe him, that he will bring home thy seed, and gather it into

thy barn?

In addition, I uncovered a further, highly illuminating reference in another book by Campbell, entitled *African Light Thrown on a Selection of Scripture Texts*, published in 1835. In it, he proffered a more detailed account of the creature's principal horn, and also divulged more details regarding the opinion of Home and others concerning the creature's nature. The pertinent extract is as follows:

About twelve hundred miles up, in the interior of Africa, from the Cape of Good Hope, we shot a large animal, evidently a species of rhinoceros, with a strong horn projecting from its forehead about three feet. Its horn is not like that of the cow, which is hollow within, but is, to the very heart, composed of a solid, horny substance, and is capable, from its own strength, and the great weight of the animal, (perhaps two tons) with facility to pierce through the most powerful animal known, yea even a brick wall. I brought home the creature's skull, with the horn and massy teeth in it.

The skull, &c. was thrice examined by the late Sir Everard Home, who was reckoned one of the first naturalists in Britain, to whom I gave all the information in my power concerning the animal. He afterwards composed an essay on it, which he read to the Royal Society, which they printed [but a copy of which I have yet to trace]. He, in the first place, considered all the animals found in a fossil state that approached to the unicorn; then those that were known; and last, the skull I had brought from a latitude in Africa where no European had been before, except one party who were all murdered a little higher up.

After stating various arguments, and particularly attending to the description given of the unicorn in the thirty-ninth chapter of the book of Job, Sir Everard gave it as his opinion, "That this animal was the unicorn of the Bible."

A party of gentlemen, from India, when

viewing the skull at the Cape of Good Hope, compared its horn, as an offensive weapon, with the offensive weapons of all the animals they were acquainted with in India, and likewise with such as they had read of; after much conversation, they were unanimously of opinion, that this animal had the most powerful offensive weapon of any animal at present known in the world.

His skin is about an inch in thickness, like that of the African rhinoceros, which cannot be penetrated by a musket ball, except immediately behind the ear, or above the head of the foreleg, where the skin is thinner than in the other parts of the body.

BIBLICAL BEASTS

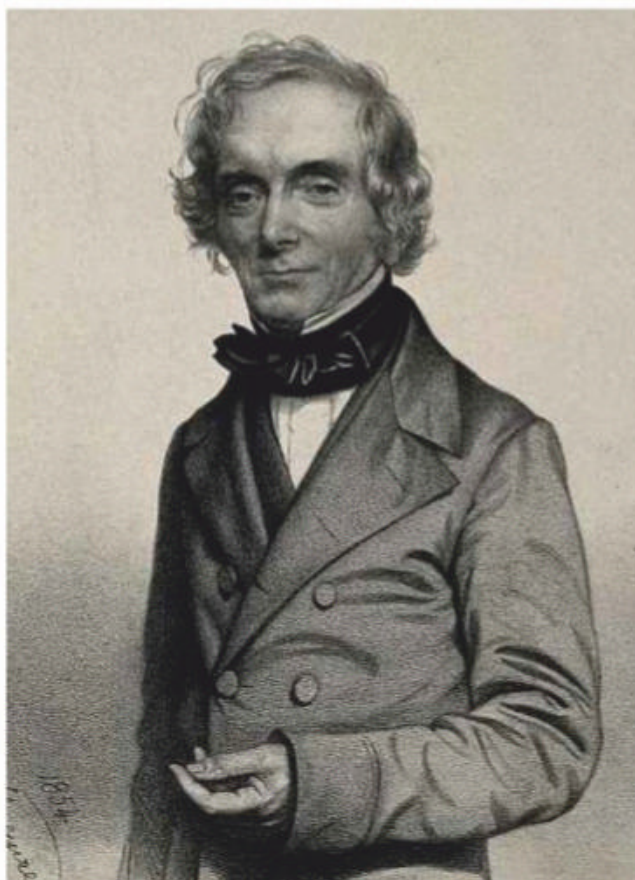
As shown earlier, the Book of Job contains no descriptive details concerning the biblical unicorn's form, so I remain unclear as to how that passage could have convinced Home that Campbell's creature was the biblical unicorn. Campbell, conversely, had provided a very accurate description of the nature and form of a rhinoceros horn, which in reality constitutes an extremely dense, solid, keratinous mass, but which exhibits a deceptively horn-like external appearance. Equally, there is no doubt from his two separate accounts quoted here that Campbell did consider this 'unicorn' to be a rhinoceros, and a very large one at that, albeit with a highly aberrant horn complement – or was it highly aberrant? It is often said that a picture is worth a thousand words, so it was with a mixture of delight but also initial bewilderment that I beheld the full-page colour drawing of this animal's head that accompanied his original 1822 account, which is reproduced here on p43.

It has to be said that this is not one of the most accurate renditions of a rhinoceros head that I have ever seen. Nevertheless, it clearly reveals that in spite of Campbell's claim to the contrary (and faithfully reiterated in the subsequent media versions), the long, slender, principal horn was not borne upon the creature's brow at all, but just behind its nose. True, in the drawing it was positioned a little further back than is typical for modern-day rhinos, but even so it is still borne upon the nasal bones, with the much smaller second horn sited just behind it, exactly as in all African rhinos, whether of the black (aka hook-lipped) species *Diceros bicornis* or of the white (aka square-lipped) species *Ceratotherium simum*. Consequently, any comparisons to unicorns are instantly discredited, because the fabled unicorn's single horn characteristically arises directly from the centre of its brow – that is, from its frontal bones.

Having said this, one might conceivably argue that as the drawing was far from being an exact depiction of a rhinoceros head, perhaps its placement of the long principal horn on the nasal bones was in fact another manifestation of its inaccuracy, and that it should have depicted this horn arising from the frontal bones instead, in accordance with



ABOVE: A unicorn in a 1551 woodcut after Conrad Gessner. Sir Everard Home believed that Campbell's mystery beast was indeed "the unicorn of the Bible" as described in the 39th chapter of the Book of Job.



ABOVE LEFT: William J Burchell, the explorer-naturalist who confirmed the existence of the white rhinoceros in 1817. **ABOVE RIGHT:** The head of a living South African white rhino; it has a notably long, slender principal horn recalling that of Campbell's specimen from 1820.

Campbell's verbal description of it projecting "from the forehead". Yet if this were true, surely Campbell would either have not included the drawing in his book at all or, at the very least, would have appended to it a comment highlighting its error.

The likeliest explanation for this inconsistency between drawing and description is that it was in fact Campbell who was less than precise, when describing the long principal horn's location on the creature's head, but that as he apparently had no issue with the drawing, its depiction of this horn's location was a faithful representation of what he had seen and had tried to convey verbally. This explanation meant that another line of speculation – namely, that perhaps this particular individual really had possessed a freak, teratological horn projecting from its brow – was also unnecessary. Interestingly, as I mentioned in a chapter reviewing contentious rhinoceroses in my book *Extraordinary Animals Revisited* (2007), towards the end of the 19th century London Zoo exhibited a female great Indian rhino *Rhinoceros unicornis* (a species normally possessing only a single horn) that bore a rudimentary second horn on her forehead – but this minor excrescence was far-removed indeed from the formidable 3ft-long primary horn under consideration here.

Back in Campbell's time, both the black rhinoceros and the white rhinoceros still existed throughout South Africa, but the species referred to above by him as the common African rhinoceros was the black rhino, whose principal horn tends to be shorter, more curved, and burlier than that of the white rhino, which is sometimes extremely long, straighter, but slender – thereby corresponding well with both the drawing and Campbell's verbal description.

Similarly, the white rhino's second horn is often extremely small, again corresponding with both drawing and description.

Lastly, but of crucial significance, is that whereas the black rhino had been formally described and taxonomically named as long ago as 1758 (by Linnæus himself), the white rhino remained scientifically unrecognised until 1817. While exploring South Africa from 1810 to 1815, English explorer-naturalist William J Burchell had heard tell from the Boer settlers of a mysterious giant rhinoceros, bigger than the black species. After confirming its existence when encountering it at Chue Springs on 16 October 1812 and collecting some teeth, horns, and epinasal skin, in 1817 Burchell dubbed this newly revealed, extra-large species the white rhinoceros *Rhinoceros simus* – 'white' actually being a mistranslation of the Afrikaans word for 'wide', referring to its broad lips. (In 1867, British zoologist John E Gray transferred it into its own genus, *Ceratotherium*, and changed its species name to *simum*.) In short, the white rhinoceros was still largely unknown outside zoological circles in 1820 when Campbell encountered it, which undoubtedly increased still further his confusion.

Taking all of the above-discussed aspects into consideration, it is evident that the decapitated unicorn from South Africa was simply a white rhinoceros, incompletely recognised by Campbell (though entirely familiar to the natives, as noted by him), inaccurately reported by the media (plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose!), and implausibly transmuted by scholars of Scripture and science alike into the zoological identity of a biblical mystery beast.

My thanks to Daniel Frankham for his much-appreciated assistance in my

resurrection and unmasking of this fascinating denizen of the Dark Continent.

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TURKEY IN TINFOIL

As the nation undergoes turmoil, with conspiracies involving ripped jeans, psychic assassins and Jewish earthquake-machines all being framed as handy scapegoats, **SD TUCKER** elects to talk Turkey.

TOO MANY COOKS

Watching the barren wasteland that is present-day British TV, one question above all strikes the comatose viewer: ‘Why are there so many boring cookery programmes?’ Evidently the same problem affects Turkish television, as shown by a 2016 interview with Yigit Bulut, a senior political and economic advisor to the country’s all-powerful President and incipient dictator Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Islamist leader of the inaptly named Justice and Development Party (AKP). “The other day I was watching a programme,” Bulut complained. “There was an English guy and an Italian wandering from one village to the next and cooking up dishes to discover the delicacies of Anatolia... What is the point of that?” I have often asked myself the same question. Bulut’s answer to this mystery, however, was half-baked: “They are collecting a [spy] database! Our compatriots are credulous. They open up their doors to them, tell them their secrets, tell them there is a military airbase in the corner, a munitions depot, and how to get in and out of a village [via the nearest road, maybe?]. And please, no-one tell me this is a conspiracy theory or that I am exaggerating!” But it is, and he is. Bulut has prior form here. During a 2013 nationwide outbreak of protests against Erdogan’s misrule known as the ‘Gezi Park’ affair, Bulut argued that the true instigators of anti-AKP rallies were the German airline Lufthansa, who objected to Erdogan’s creation of a massive new airport in Istanbul, which Bulut said would somehow divert “100 million passengers... from Germany to Turkey”, just like EasyJet, thus hitting their profits. Meanwhile, Bulut opined, scared of how Erdogan had transformed Turkey into a “model for the world”, evil foreigners “from many countries” had simultaneously tried to “kill Erdogan from afar using methods like telekinesis”. ¹

In Erdogan’s Turkey, such statements can be a good way to advance your career. In August 2013, a mere month after Bulut’s PK comments, which immediately preceded his own promotion, an official report from the Turkish Prime Ministry Inspection Board similarly concluded that the suicides of four military engineers in 2006/07 might also have been due to psychic warfare. Some had previously complained of headaches, a detail the eminent Turkish neuropsychologist

Kasif Nevzat Tarhan said could have been caused by malicious brainwaves being beamed out to them from a mile away by psychic warriors. Tarhan is a genuine shrink, with books such as *Love Therapy*, *A Model of Mature Man* and *Is There Anyone Wanting to Understand Me?* to his name – but he is also the author of titles like *Asymmetric War*, *Psychological Warfare* and *Mother, What Is a Coup?*, indicating he might be keen (or simply wise enough) to try and curry favour with the AKP authorities. ²

POLITICAL DINOSAURS

But this can sometimes be a dangerous game to play, as the case of Melih Gokcek, first elected Mayor of Ankara in 1994, demonstrates. A fellow AKP founder with Erdogan, Gokcek successfully won favour with his boss-to-be, helping him stay in office for 20-odd years. Or, then again, maybe Gokcek had other methods of maintaining his position. “I have the largest intelligence service in the world,” he boasted in 2017. “Google. You can find anything on Google. In Turkey, I am the person who uses Google in the best way... I would like to thank Google [for this].” But what had Google allowed Gokcek to discover? Only that America and Israel had been conspiring

together to steal earthquake-energy from Turkey’s many geological faultlines for free electricity! The Zionist-Yankee alliance had mismanaged this task, though, as “just like an atom bomb, the energy in the ground exploded” while they were tapping it, “and it turned into an earthquake”. But, foreign devils being what they are, they had then conspired to *deliberately* unleash a series of earthquakes upon Turkey, hoping thereby to destroy its economy. The sharp decline in the Turkish lira during 2017/18 thus had nothing to do with Erdogan’s belief that low interest rates combat inflation (the reverse being true), but everything to do with the fact that Google had allowed Sherlock Gokcek to ascertain that, prior to a series of large tremors in 2017, a seismic research vessel had been spotted off the Aegean coast – presumably because the region is, and has always been, prone to such events. Gokcek deduced otherwise, arguing that “which country it belongs to should be resolved urgently”, lest the quake in question proved “artificial”, something he deemed “a very serious possibility”. Possibly Google had allowed Gokcek to access the Twitter feed of the pro-AKP commentator Omer Turan, who likewise claimed that “Deep NATO” – namely, the Twin Satans of



LEFT: Mayor of Ankara Melih Gokcek looks out over the Turkish capital and imagines it filled with dinosaurs.

ADEM ALTAN / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

Britain and America – had together caused the “definitely not normal” quakes, as part of a “multi-dimensional and gradual chaos coup process”, as “an honest seismologist” would tell you.

Alternatively, was Fethullah Gulen behind the quakes? Gulen is an Islamist cleric and former ally of Erdogan, living safely in exile in the United States and now Turkey’s public enemy number one; he was blamed for the massive military coup attempt against the AKP in 2016. According to Gokcek, Gulen has incredible powers, which allow him not only to make the Earth move but also to control rebellious soldiers and protestors via the medium of *djinn*, or genies. “He enslaves people with the ‘three-lettered things’ [genies],” Gokcek told CNN in 2016, suggesting that Gulen’s evil spirits had caused the abortive coup’s participants to become “mesmerised” into doing their master’s bidding.

Another way of getting in Erdogan’s good books may have been for Gokcek to become involved in football – the President was once a footballer himself. Accordingly, Gokcek became the ‘honorary president’ of Ankara’s club Ankaraspor, who in 2014 renamed themselves Osmanlispor (referring to Osman I, founder of the Ottoman Empire), and began erecting statues of Turkish janissaries (imperial soldiers) around their stadium. This was in line with the AKP’s cherished project of ‘making Turkey great again’ by rekindling memories of Turkey’s imperial past. The club’s badge also suddenly changed from an Anatolian leopard to what at first looks like a football, but which on closer inspection reveals itself as a sphere of Turko-Islamic crescent moons. Many fans objected and mocked, but so what? Being in office for so long, Gokcek thought he could do whatever he liked, and decided what he liked to do most was to build giant robots in the middle of roundabouts.

On 1 April 2015, Ankara awoke to find a six-foot-tall Transformer-alike called Otorobot (‘Ottoman-Robot’, presumably) standing on a roundabout in the city centre. It was intended as an advert for Gokcek’s odd plan to rejuvenate Ankara’s economy by building a huge theme-park filled with lifesize models of robots and dinosaurs, on which sculptures he allegedly squandered \$3.2m of public cash. Turkey’s Chamber of Architects and Engineers unsuccessfully sued Gokcek for mismanagement of funds, leading him to order them to “respect our robot” on the grounds that “my robot has more brains than all of you combined”. Nonetheless, Otorobot proved unpopular with tax-payers, so Gokcek removed it... replacing it instead with a series of colossal T-Rexes and sauropods on the nation’s roundabouts. Evidently Jews and *djinn* were not the only ones capable of causing



ABOVE: Mayor Gokcek’s giant ‘Transformer’ robot appeared in the middle of an Ankara roundabout.

“MY ROBOT HAS MORE BRAINS THAN ALL OF YOU COMBINED!”

economic madness.

When in 2017 a national referendum was held on the nature of Erdogan’s future rule and he nearly lost, the President sought scapegoats everywhere but within a mirror. Eventually, he blamed “metal fatigue”, or rustiness, amongst long-serving and clapped-out underlings like Gokcek for the fact he had lost the popular vote in large, more secular cities like Ankara, being saved only by the more religious folk out in the provinces. So, by October, Gokcek was ‘voluntarily’ resigning as Mayor. Much better that than being accused of being a Gulenist... especially as, just like Erdogan himself, he had formerly publicly praised the exiled cleric, although surely only at the behest of a genie.³

COURTROOM DRAMAS

Erdogan is an expert in the art of reverse-ferret; his sudden about-turn over a pair of long-running conspiracy trials dubbed ‘Ergenekon’ and ‘Operation Sledgehammer’ featured a brand of twisted paranoid logic worthy of Stalin. “Democracy is like a tram,” he famously ‘joked’ in 1996. “You get off when you have reached your destination.” And, once they have

helped get you there, you can also throw your fellow-travellers onto the track and watch them die for good measure. These two trials are the Turkish equivalent of America’s JFK and 9/11 controversies combined, and every bit as labyrinthine, but, in brief, involved allegations (not *in themselves* implausible, given the army’s proven record of overthrowing perceived Islamist politicians down the years) that, following the AKP’s initial election in 2001, military preparations had been almost immediately instigated to bring Erdogan down. Hundreds of military men, opposition politicians and journalists were charged – or purged, perhaps – on distinctly dubious evidence. For instance, the Sledgehammer plan was said to have been laid down in writing (why?) in 2003 – but somehow the plotters had managed to perform this task using a copy of Microsoft Word 2007. Some of the targeted journalists, though, were truly guilty only of reporting on the fact that Gulen and his allies had been infiltrating the police, judiciary and civil service for decades, with the aim of helping Islamise them – something which is probably true. For years, the Gulenists had provided education to the children of the pious rural poor and helped them pass civil service exams, allegedly after stealing the questions, in the hope of thereby beginning a Gramsci-style ‘long march through the institutions’.

When Erdogan came to power, he needed the help of these Gulenist plants to overthrow the staunchly secular ‘Kemalist’ guardians of the State (named after the father of modern Turkey, Kemal Ataturk, who thought Islam primitive nonsense and

ADEM ALTAN / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

did his best to banish it from public life) who were not sympathetic to his aims. So, exposure of this genuine conspiracy was then *verboten*. However, following the violent crackdown on dissent after 2013's Gezi Park protests, Gulenists grew uncomfortable, with their newspaper *Zaman*, which had once printed much helpful false information about the conspiracy trials, now publishing criticism of State brutality instead. Furthermore, several of Erdogan's relatives and business and political allies were charged with financial corruption in December 2013. The chief prosecutor in these corruption cases, Zekeriya Oz, was widely painted as a Gulenist. He had also been chief prosecutor in the Ergenekon trial, so to discredit him, Erdogan now had to perform a shameless *volte-face*. Suddenly, the Gulenists he had formerly defended were now part of what he called a "parallel state" which had infiltrated the legal system in order to pull off a "judicial coup" – Erdogan omitted to mention that he already knew this and had reputedly previously used these same infiltrators in an earlier judicial coup of his own.

Prosecutor Oz himself was now condemned, and most of those he had once helped convict were arbitrarily recast as victims of a major treasonous conspiracy and released, as were suspects in the Sledgehammer trial. By June 2016, the Gulenists were officially decreed a 'terrorist organisation', and within a month the military coup had broken out. Erdogan now had the perfect excuse to begin a massive programme of sacking and imprisoning opponents of any and all kinds, whether military, Gulenist, Kemalist or otherwise – over 100,000 have now been detained,

with even such figures as Turkey's former World Cup star-striker Hakan Sukur being implausibly condemned as dangerous enemies of the people. This is one possible interpretation of affairs, anyway; as with the JFK assassination, you sifts your evidence and you takes your choice. It is not impossible that some defendants were indeed guilty of certain dubious things. The whole issue has now become so complex, you can seek to lay almost any interpretation you like on it all. ⁴

THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE TELEVISED (DOMESTICALLY)

One viral video widely circulated online purports to show a Gulenist up before a panel of judges who ask him to name his co-conspirators. The defendant looks up at his accusers and says words to the effect of "You, you, you and you". Presumably this is an attempt at satire rather than genuine footage, but such cynical sentiments cannot be allowed to circulate unimpeded. One simple strategy is to crack down on online dissent; hence in 2016 a Turkish citizen named Rifat Cetin was given a one-year

suspended sentence and had his parental custody rights stripped away for the heinous 'crime' of posting images of Erdogan and the slimy monster Gollum from *The Hobbit* film side-by-side on Facebook and jesting that they looked like one another. ⁵

A better tactic, though, was to take over the Turkish mass-media and fill it with pro-AKP conspiracy musings to the Party's benefit, which is how you end up with absurdities like the Islamist-loving *Yeni Akit* newspaper printing 'revelations' about people wearing jeans actually being members of "foreign intelligence units and their co-conspirators" who communicate with one another by means of the specific patterns of fashionable tears in their casual-wear. Apparently, some 23 million pairs of jeans are sold in Turkey annually; that's an awful lot of Mossad moles to keep tabs on. Such a story serves the simultaneous purposes of making a paranoid populace feel even more so, fuelling the useful AKP narrative of a nation under siege from quislings, Anglo-Saxons, Gulenists and Jews, whilst also making non-traditional Kemalist-friendly Western habits of dress and lifestyle seem inherently suspicious and undesirable. After all, who but one who had been hypnotised by Gulen's army of jean genies would be willing to wear such *kuffar* abominations as ripped Levis? ⁶

The AKP was only formed in 2001, rising out of the ashes of earlier Islamist parties which had been banned by the Kemalists. As such, they were initially obliged to make use of pre-existing Gulenist-owned TV stations and newspapers like *Zaman* to spread their word, particularly during the Sledgehammer and Ergenekon trials. But by the time of the 2013 Gezi Park affair – which began as protests about an AKP decision to demolish a much-loved Istanbul park and replace it with a large shopping centre built in the shape of an Ottoman-era artillery barracks, but grew into far wider protests about Erdogan's rule after excessively heavy-handed police tactics were used to dispel crowds – the Gulenist press grew less pliant. Fortunately, the AKP's rise had been facilitated partly by a 2000/01 financial crash in Turkey, which had left many media organisations vulnerable to financial take-over – by, for example, firms managed by the likes of Erdogan's son-in-law, with the aid of financing from State-owned banks. Thus, during the 2013 protests, a number of extraordinary tactics were used on the by-now AKP-dominated TV stations and in print to get everyone to shut up and go home.

Firstly, the domestically managed news channel CNN Turk decided to show an important documentary about penguins instead of footage of the rallies. This backfired, though, with later surveys showing that 84 per cent of demonstrators questioned were actually protesting about such media censorship, as opposed to a mere

THE CNN TURK NEWS CHANNEL DECIDED TO SHOW A DOCUMENTARY ABOUT PENGUINS



LEFT: A woman waves a flag bearing the image of Kemal Attaturk during the 2013 Gezi Park protests in Taksim, Istanbul. Meanwhile, Turkish TV news channel CNN Turk showed a documentary about penguins.



LEFT: The Gezi Park penguins have now become a symbol of protest, as this fifth-anniversary T-shirt demonstrates.

56 per cent who actually gave a toss about the loss of the park. Furthermore, daring media terrorists on the TV game-show *Word Game* mounted an abortive assault from within Dictionary Corner by smuggling a series of questions whose answers referred obliquely to the protests on their show, making the government look stupid. Therefore, it was decided to begin spreading fake news and conspiracy theories over the airwaves and on newsstands too, to make the protestors look like the dupes of Israel, *Shaytan*, Britain, Gulen and America.

Melih Gokcek chipped in, accusing a BBC Turkey correspondent of being an English spy. The newspaper *Yeni Safak* claimed a play being staged in Turkey was secretly funded by Britain, whose ‘rehearsals’ were really disguised war-games for a street-led revolution in the park. Some columnists whispered of the CIA and Mossad, and of free pizzas being distributed to rebels by unknown powers based in Mexico. Beyaz TV broadcast the highly reliable assertion of a random young child that the protestors “were probably drinking cat blood”. Other journalists said it was all a plot to cause traffic-jams or rob Istanbul of its chance to host the Olympics, or maybe a scheme to suck Turkey’s reservoirs dry by tricking people into standing around outside all day long in the summer heat drinking loads of water. Then again, maybe the gatherings were just cover for mass prostitution, or blasphemous gang-bangs in local mosques? Erdogan himself promised to release CCTV footage of protestors getting drunk on holy premises, but the imam of the mosque supposedly so desecrated denied such film existed, whereupon he was reassigned to duties elsewhere. Meanwhile, one woman was supposedly urinated on and had her

baby kicked by thugs, by implication simply because she was dressed in a *hijab* – except this didn’t happen at all. It was a wonder she didn’t say her baby had been bayoneted by the Elders of Zion.

Particularly astonishing were the actions of the paper *Takvin*, which carried a front-page “dirty confession” from celebrity CNN anchor Christiane Amanpour, in which she said the US news network had staged the protests to “destabilise” Turkey at the behest of “giant finance lobbies” (spot the code-word) – but a tiny small-print notice tucked away inside admitted the claim was “unreal, like CNN’s journalism”, as revenge for the US branch of the channel having inexplicably covered Gezi Park rather than the continued geopolitically significant activities of Pingu and chums. No wonder only 38 per cent of Turks now say they trust the news – at least according to that noted fake-news media organisation Reuters.⁷ Another amazing interview appeared in *Yeni Safak*, in which the archetypal Western left wing theorist Noam Chomsky really did appear to act as a useful idiot, spouting various items of pro-Erdogan propaganda which were then re-tweeted by government ministers. However, for a celebrated linguistic professor, he was saying some very strange and non-grammatical things, such as “Contrary to what happens when everything that milk port, enters the work order, then begins to bustle in the West” and “But there it also let’s open a parenthesis”. Had he just had a stroke? No. Hacks had indeed interviewed Chomsky, but then made up additional ‘quotes’ praising Erdogan’s policies in Turkish, fed them through the garble-machine of Google Translate, and then printed them as Chomsky’s own words in English, or something roughly

approximating to it. Whilst *Takvin* later admitted ‘errors’, their initial response was to say they had been victims of a conspiracy.⁸ But by whom? Well, in spite of all this blatant Islamist media manipulation, the AKP and its allies still maintain that Jews secretly control much of the world’s media, as we shall see next time. If they control Turkey’s, then they’re making a pretty poor job of it.

NOTES

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More things in Heaven and Earth...

ANDREW MAY explores Shakespeare's sceptics versus believers debate.

As a fortean, I've always been fascinated by the eternal conflict between believers and sceptics about all things paranormal. It really is eternal, too. The same drama that plays out on social media and online message boards today has been going on for centuries. You only have to dip into the works of Shakespeare to see that.

Let's start with astrology – the curiously widespread belief that, as the Earl of Kent puts it in Act 4 of *King Lear*, “it is the stars, the stars above us govern our conditions”. Earlier in the same play, another peer of the realm – the Earl of Gloucester – likewise reveals himself to be a devotee of astrology: “These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us”. No sooner has Gloucester left the stage, however, than his son Edmund volunteers an opposing view on the subject: “When we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon and the stars, as if we were villains on necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion.”

The flowery language aside, that's pretty much what a hard-nosed sceptic might say today. So was Shakespeare a sceptic? It's not an easy question to answer. On the one hand, he articulates sceptical arguments admirably well, as in that speech. On the other, his plays are replete with supernatural scenes. Even if we ignore obvious fantasies like *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, there are the three witches in the otherwise down-to-earth *Macbeth*. They're not just witches in name, either – they make a number of specific prophecies, all of which come true. And one



ABOVE: Horatio, Marcellus and Hamlet encounter the ghost of the late King in Act 1, Scene 4 of *Hamlet*.

of Shakespeare's supposedly “historical” plays, *Henry VI Part 2*, has a group of conspirators summoning the demon Asmath. It's a scene straight out of a Hammer movie, complete with thunderstorm, chalk circle and Latin incantations – and it produces results. Asmath appears on stage and speaks a few lines.

But Shakespeare has a sceptical antidote to that. In another of the history plays, *Henry IV Part 1*, there's a famous encounter between Englishman Harry Hotspur and Welshman Owen Glendower. When the latter boasts “I can call spirits from the vasty deep,” Hotspur comes back with the perfect cynical put-down: “Why so can I, or so can any man. But will they come when you do call for them?”

Another Shakespearean sceptic is Julius Caesar, in the play of that name. “Beware the ides of March,” a soothsayer tells him in Act 1. But Caesar remains unruffled. “He is a dreamer; let us leave him,” he says. The ides of March was the Roman name for the 15th of that month – and when that day dawns, Caesar is still very much alive. Seeing the same soothsayer again,

and convinced the prophecy was nonsense, he smugly tells him “the ides of March are come.” The soothsayer, equally convinced of the prophecy's veracity, replies “Ay, Cæsar; but not gone.” This exchange occurs at the start of Act 3, Scene 1. Before that scene is over, Cæsars blood-drenched corpse is sprawled on the steps of the Senate.

In the next act of the play, Cæsar makes a brief posthumous appearance when his spirit confronts one of the assassins (“Great Cæsar's ghost!” as Perry White would have said in the *Superman* comics). A sceptic could argue there's nothing supernatural about this – it's just the figment of a guilty conscience. But the same can't be said of another Shakespearean ghost: the one in *Hamlet*. It's seen by multiple independent witnesses, and they all identify it as Hamlet's recently deceased father. When the ghost finally gets Hamlet alone and speaks to him, it gives him information he couldn't possibly have learned by any other means. It tells him that, contrary to the official line, Hamlet's father was murdered

by his uncle – and even gives a detailed account of the *modus operandi*. Hamlet's paranormal encounter, in the play's first act, provides the driving force for the whole drama. It's not simply a matter of believing what the ghost told him; after all, “the spirit that I have seen may be a devil,” as he says. But it sparks an internal conflict between belief and doubt that underlies all his subsequent actions.

The fact that Shakespeare gave a supernatural entity a starring role in his most famous work makes me think he was a believer rather than a sceptic – or maybe somewhere in the grey area between the two, like a true fortean. Certainly no fortean can argue with the line he gives Hamlet, in response to his friend's amazement at the “wondrous strange” appearance of the ghost: “There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.”

♦ **ANDREW MAY** is a regular contributor to FT whose recent books include *Rockets and Ray Guns: the Sci-Fi Science of the Cold War* and *Cosmic Impact*.

Yukio Mishima's UFOs

BRETT TAYLOR revisits a little-known but still relevant 1962 contactee novel by Japanese author Yukio Mishima.

So far, English language readers have been deprived of the chance to read Yukio Mishima's *Utsukushi Hoshi* (*Beautiful Star*). The 1962 novel suggests a passing familiarity with the UFO contactee phenomenon, or at least with the movie *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, about aliens trying to save Earth from nuclear destruction. Of Japan's 20th century writers Mishima is the best known in the West, yet his only science fiction novel has never been published in English. Over 50 years since the novel flopped in Japan, a film version adapted by Seitaro Kai and directed by Daihachi Yoshida was released in 2017. The film updates the story to the present day, which is appropriate, as its doomsday concerns remain as relevant as ever.

Beautiful Star belongs to a small subgenre of science fiction, represented by a handful of novels written with varying degrees of credulity, in which central characters become curiously obsessed with the idea of their own connection to an extraterrestrial force. I'm thinking mainly of HG Wells's *Star Begotten*, a study of mass hysteria written on the brink of World War II, and Philip K Dick's *Radio Free Albemuth*, a characteristically paranoid tale that takes place in an alternate world version of the Nixon years. Mishima's novel also vaguely resembles a less subtle and less confined version of Shirley Jackson's 1958 novel *The Sundial*, another study of mass hysteria in which a group of peculiar characters, most of them related,



ABOVE: 25 November 1970: Mishima speaking before Japanese Self-Defence Force soldiers at Tokyo's army garrison. After his exhortations that the soldiers join his planned coup failed, the novelist disembowelled himself in an act of *seppuku*.

await an apocalypse that may or may not be actually taking place.

The story of *Beautiful Star* anticipates the plot of Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, though Spielberg was not interested in the bleak politics of nuclear war. I attribute this vague similarity of plot to the participation of the film's initial screenwriter Paul Schrader, who later made the film biography *Mishima*. As far as I know, Schrader does not read Japanese, but his brother Leonard certainly did. Schrader saw Spielberg's story of alien contact as a parallel to the story of Saul's conversion to Christianity on the road to Damascus, a Christian allegory that did little to impress Spielberg, a secular Jew more interested in pop culture than world religion.

Beautiful Star's family, the Osugis, are convinced they are from outer space, sent back to

Earth is watched over by the denizens of other planets



warn the Earthlings of their imminent doom. Earth is watched over at all times by the denizens of other planets, and if we humans could ever find peace and tap into our full potential, Earth would be a 'beautiful star' for all the Universe to admire (the words "star" and "planet" being used interchangeably throughout). For the young Akiko, an ideal date is to join Takemiya, a local politician who is sympathetic to these outer space warnings, and watch as three flying saucers hover over the ocean, changing colour until they vibrate in an orange glow and disappear from view.

Like many others of his nation, Mishima was affected by the first *Godzilla* film, a sombre black and white monster movie with nuclear themes that resonated deeply in the post-Hiroshima consciousness of Japan. This led to an interest on his part in



science fiction films, *Forbidden Planet* being a particular favourite. An interest in UFOs followed, to the degree that Mishima joined a UFO research society. With his friend Sakyo Kamatsu, the author of such Japanese bestsellers as *The Submersion of Japan* and *Day of Resurrection*, both made into blockbuster films, Mishima took to the rooftop of an observatory to look for flying saucers with a telescope. They never saw one, but the experience inspired the early activities of *Beautiful Star's* Juichiro. Mishima's interest in science fiction was brief. It was not a genre to which he was naturally suited, and he disliked the populist fantasy of Osamu Dazai and Ray Bradbury, but was more appreciative of Arthur C Clarke, an overtly scientific author (almost the opposite of what I'd expect from a devoted romantic like Mishima).

Given Mishima's insistence that science fiction writing must possess a believable sense of scientific accuracy such as is found in Clarke's works, it is somewhat amusing to discover that the closest *Beautiful Star* comes to scientific credibility is a dry one-page summary of the famous Kentucky UFO encounter between Thomas Mantell, a Fort Knox Air Force captain, and a mysterious object that may or may not have been a Skyhook balloon. The account is credited to *Origin of the Flying Saucers*, which is described as an early book of UFO study from London. I have yet to uncover any evidence of a real book by this name, but it might have been *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects* by Edward J Ruppelt. Whether this counts as "science" or not depends, I suppose, on whether one considers the study of flying saucer anecdotes to be a scientific discipline.

Beautiful Star is clearly a novel of its time, as demonstrated by the frequent references to Khrushchev and the pervasive air of imminent nuclear doom; it is clearly inspired by the same Cold War madness that led Terry Southern and Stanley Kubrick to produce *Dr Strangelove*. In this, Mishima was eerily prescient:



Beautiful Star was published in October 1962, the very month in which the Cuban Missile Crisis brought the world to the brink of nuclear disaster. It was also written at the end of an era in which people could believe in advanced life on Mars, a popular notion in the 1950s but one that has since proven increasingly unlikely due to the evidence provided by space exploration. Mainly, *Beautiful Star* is a sort of anti-nuke novel, a sharp contrast to the Mishima of a few years later, with his humourless demands that Japan become a nuclear power immediately. Most Japanese rejected this demand outright; they were closer in their sympathies to *Beautiful Star's* pacifist spokesman Juichiro Osugi than to the right wing, ultra-nationalist Mishima of later years. Osugi takes his concerns to the local constable, who not surprisingly suspects him of Communist subversion.

The concerns of *Beautiful Star* inspired Mishima to step outside

his usual psychological concerns to turn a critical eye on modern consumer culture. Critiques of consumer culture were nothing new by 1964, but it is still interesting when Mishima writes in this vein:

So fascinating they were, those quantities of goods. The boxes of raisins looked to be made of gold, the shirts were so puffy, panties had embroidery in floral patterns, there was a model of the station and tunnel and bridge and everything. This and the toddler clothes on the other side certainly had the power to anchor minds of the people in glaciers of everyday life and could for that reason be called a cultural masterpiece. All these products were strictly separate in their functions and yet their aims were by no means coincidental. But where they lay sprawling the phosphorescent floor rushed around, driving the customers' minds half mad with detailed knowledge of the functions of life. Brooms looked like brooms, shoes like shoes. They performed each of

their given roles as a link in the immense chain that binds man to his station in life.

Beautiful Star's final chapter leads to a rejection of humanity, a wish to leave it to its own destruction, perhaps not too surprising from the loner who confessed in his early *Confessions of a Mask* that he did not care much for his fellow humans at all. The following exchange occurs amidst Earth's final riot-torn moments:

"Now look," he said. "Now look, everyone. This is our farewell to the people's streets."

"But Dad," said Kazuo while he steered the car in short jerks through these crowds, over which he had already given up the idea of ruling over. "If we give ourselves away, what happens to all these people who remain?"

Iyoko saw for the first time a smile playing over Juichiro's face as he sat in a street of cinematic sparkling lights illuminating him from behind. He spoke. His tone was very different from usual, his words bold, lacking any trace of compassion: "They would find violence anywhere, these people."

The novel ends on an ambiguous note. The Osugis race through a field of wheat until they stand before the thing they've been waiting to see, not just an alien craft but a symbol of life: "a silver-grey saucer with a light at the bottom that shifted from green to orange, just as if it were breathing." Life is to be found elsewhere, in outer space. It is not for most of us on Earth. It is a shame Mishima could not find his salvation in some better way than the nihilistic fate he chose. Whether his analysis of a doomed humanity was correct remains to be seen, but in an age of terrorism, heightened nuclear tensions, and climate change, we may all be finding out very soon.

My thanks to Damian Flanagan, Titus Theia, and most especially Donald Keene.

♦ BRETT TAYLOR has worked as a writer, photographer, union steward, tiger keeper, and poker player. He has written for *Filmfax*, *Skeptical Inquirer*, and *The South Carolina Review*.

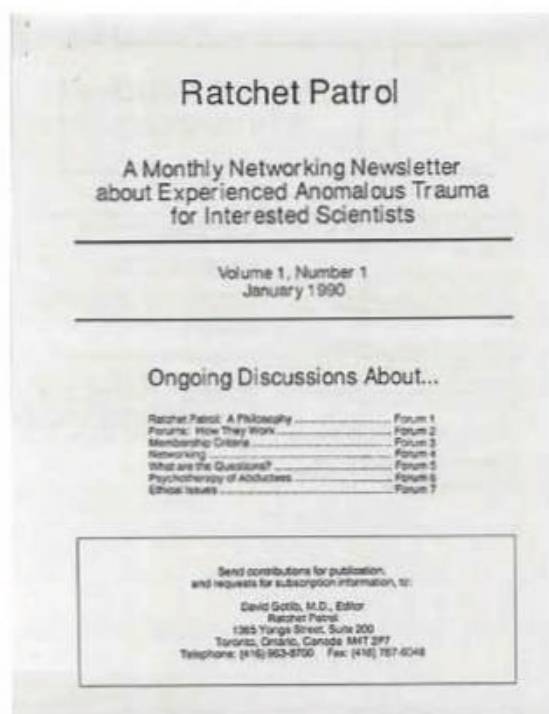
THE HIEROPHANT'S APPRENTICE PRESENTS BUILDING A FORTEAN LIBRARY

42. RATSHIT PATROL: A HARVEST OF GOLD

It's always been our plan that every now and then we'd look at a seminal fortean journal. This might have been relatively easy for us, but perhaps a bit harder on readers, who would have some difficulty in finding issues of long-since defunct publications with sometimes tiny circulations and a rather short life. However, with considerable success, the indefatigable Isaac Koi has persisted in his knightly quest to dredge the past and its inhabitants and descendants for permissions to upload scans of such obscure effulgences, and in all European languages. Most of them, inevitably, but not all, are of a ufological bent. Which makes life a lot easier for enquiring minds, and gives us our opportunity. Welcome, then, to the first of these periodical scans of scans of periodicals: and a big hand, please, for *Ratshit Patrol*.

Actually – sorry to disappoint so soon – its first name was *Ratchet Patrol*, until a reader pointed out what that sounded too much like. In the eyes of some that may have been not inappropriate. But as founder and editor David Gotlib (pictured on opposite page) – a psychotherapist from Toronto, with a first degree in computer science – said in the launch issue:

“The name occurred to me as I was reading through an issue of the *Skeptical Inquirer*. One of the qualities of ‘believers,’ the author said, was what he called the ‘Ratchet Effect’: ‘The brains of “believers” operate like ratchet mechanisms: Phenomena that reinforce beliefs wind the ratchet’s grip tighter. But negative evidence, like reversing the winder of your watch, produces no corresponding unwinding and loosening of the ratchet’s hold.’ This struck me as a perfect physical model of the reaction that our work triggers in so many people. What unites us across our differing professions and opinions is that we are consciously trying to approach the abduction issue in a ‘ratchet-free’ way.” So what might be misconstrued as *Ratshit Patrol* might likewise be misconstrued as altogether too judgemental, not to say noisily negativist, and the third issue of this “Networking newsletter about the UFO ‘Abduction’ Phenomenon and Related Issues for Interested Scientists” was titled *The Bulletin of Anomalous Experience*, which implicitly widened its remit somewhat. *BAE* ran bi-monthly from January 1990 until December 1994, when Gotlib announced he was taking a year’s sabbatical from the job, but it never



did reappear. Initially the newsletter behaved just like a networking medium, with various ‘forums’ dedicated to crucial aspects of how professionals might go about dealing with abduction experiences. Gotlib’s own perspective is clear: he’s not impressed by the likes of Hopkins’s and Jacobs’s alien-infested presumptions, or (in due course: the reviews are sharp as scythes) Mack’s writings, any more than he is with dismissive scepticism; this doesn’t stand in the way of a natural curiosity to know what causes abduction experiences. His stated therapeutic aim is to help ‘abductees’ integrate their experience into their daily, ‘normal’ lives, a somewhat ambiguous goal that could have many different, albeit one hopes beneficial, outcomes. After making a presentation to a MUFON Symposium, he gets to meet Phil Klass, with comic results

that expose an unfortunate facet of Klass’s sometimes a-logical approach to things that tried his patience.

Within a year *BAE*’s scope had widened so far as to include this:

“[M]any of my patients have family members who have also had ‘abduction’ or UFO encounters.... In one situation, I was able to see both the experiencer and her mother. The following information came to light:

- “Mother recalls that she became pregnant 10 months after marriage. The couple was using both a diaphragm and a condom, and they did not understand how she could have become pregnant. A few years ago, while experiencing a resurgence of memories of anomalous experiences, mother recalled a memory, from around the time of the conception of her daughter, of ‘little grey guys’ (my phrase) standing around her bed, fertilising her egg with her husband’s sperm and inserting it into her abdomen.

- “Mother recalls that during the last stages of labour, there was a period of one hour during which nobody could locate her. She recalls being in a round room (her labour room was square) where her baby was born, and the ‘little grey guys’ were using a device that looked like a dental instrument on the baby. Then the baby was ‘put back in.’

- “Daughter (now in her 30s) reports a lifelong history of encounters with the little visitors. She remembers a similar instrument to the one her mother describes being used on her.

“I present this as an interesting anecdote that appeared without leading or suggestion of any kind. I have heard from other therapists of unusual happenings, and the presence of the ‘little grey guys,’ in hospital delivery rooms. Documentation of such an anomalous event (especially by nursing and medical notes) would be of obvious importance.

“Anybody have any similar stories?”

No one it seems gave a direct answer to the invitation, but over the years there were several contributions questioning the ‘missing foetus/hybrid baby’ scenario. There are also many discussions of false memories (and the False Memory Foundation and ritual satanic abuse), the

nature of hallucinations, the problems of hypnosis, sleep disorders, PTSD, the psychological characteristics of abductees, and (inevitably) the theories of Michael Persinger (there was eventually a ‘Persinger Corner’ – at this period, papers were dropping like confetti from his pen) – and much more, from psi to visions of the Virgin Mary, that might somehow shed light on these curious accounts. Needless to say, no one came up with any evidence for an alien breeding programme, and no one ever has since. This kind of result was fairly typical. Someone would raise a question, and answers, or replies, would often as not come obliquely, by way of summaries or excerpts from the academic or technical literature, even on occasion from ufologists, leaving readers to ponder the implications without obtrusive editorialising – indeed Gotlib once described his role as being more like the chairman of a meeting than an editor. He came to repeat, in each issue, this description of *BAE*: “Our editorial policy was best described by Hilary Evans, who said we try to ‘comfortably tread the narrow path between the groves of academia and the dust and heat of the marketplace, inquiring and suggesting, not asserting or insisting.” The approach could have collapsed under its own lack of weight, but didn’t. In part, one surmises, this was because contributors were often readers, and nearly everyone involved was expert in particular ways, mostly as puzzled as anyone else by the subject, while an habitual urbanity (once a *sine qua non* of professional exchanges) inhibited aggressive disputation. Rather, there developed something akin to the ‘dialogues’ that were a feature of the late, great Marcello Truzzi’s *Zetetic Scholar*, with those in disagreement recognising that while they might have fundamental differences, each side had an overriding interest in trying to solve the problem(s) at hand. Possible exceptions to this general rule were Leo Sprinkle and the shortly-to-be-disgraced Richard Boylan, the infamous ‘Jacuzzi Therapist’ accused of enjoying improper relations with female patients in his hot tub. The former seemed smug, even patronising, in his certainties; the latter just immovably certain, as well as obtuse. Both shared a conviction the ‘the aliens’ meant nothing but well for humanity.

The range of positions can be gauged from a sample of contributors and subscribers. They included David Hufford, Hilary Evans, Kenneth Ring, Stanton Friedman, Leo Sprinkle, Dennis Stacy, Jenny Randles, Martin Kottmeyer, John Spencer, Ed Bullard, Robert Baker, John Mack, the Richards Haines and Hall, Peter Rocjewicz, Kevin McClure, Bruce Maccabee, Stuart Appelle – stellar names all in the field, and this list isn’t exhaustive. After a couple of years, abduction experiencers joined the contributors. It would have been interesting to get them all together in the

“WHY CAN’T PEOPLE JUST SIT AND READ BOOKS AND BE NICE TO EACH OTHER?”

David Baldacci



same bar for a few hours, dole out free drinks, and take bets against any fights breaking out. A yet wider range of opinion was evident in abstracts of articles and research results, as well as book extracts, that Gotlib sedulously gathered from all manner of sources and passed on to his readers in each issue.

One of the more unexpected extracts came from a US Supreme Court (SOCUS) decision. A lady from Arkansas, Vickie Lorene Rock, had gone down for manslaughter, having shot her husband dead: the gun had discharged when her husband grabbed her arm during a scuffle. Under Arkansas law an accused’s testimony is limited to matters that he or she can prove were remembered *before* hypnosis. The subtlety here was that the defendant had recalled, after but not under hypnosis, that her finger was not on the trigger when the pistol went off. She had the gun examined by a gunsmith, who determined that it would fire by itself, as it were, in certain circumstances – such as someone being violently struck while holding it (in other words it was a dangerous piece of crap). None of this was allowed as evidence in Mrs Rock’s defence – although an obvious objection would be that the pistol *could* have been tested regardless; why it wasn’t, who might say? In a 6-3 majority decision, SOCUS ruled that in this case Mrs Rock’s constitutional right to defend herself had been breached: “Wholesale inadmissibility of a defendant’s testimony is an arbitrary restriction on the right to testify in the absence of clear evidence by the State repudiating the validity of all posthypnosis recollections.” But SOCUS

was careful not to endorse hypnosis *per se*, recommending that each case should be considered on its merits, and indicated that hypnotic evidence should always be independently corroborated (as, in this case, it was by the gunsmith). Seems reasonable.

Generally, it was original contributions that generated the most debate. One such was Ann Druffel’s article “Can Unwanted ‘UFO Contact’ Be Resisted?”, to which her short answer is “Yes”. Not least, it turns out, because Druffel rejected the idea of flesh-and-blood-type aliens; it’s also noticeable that the techniques she outlines here ought to work against nightmare or visionary figures, which her cited cases all resemble, although she doesn’t say so. (Six years after this piece, she published a whole book on the subject, *How to Defend Yourself Against Alien Abduction*.) Argument over that, led by flesh-and-blood (or is it chlorophyll-and-ichor?) devotee Richard Boylan rumbled on for many issues. Dennis Stacy’s rumination on whether abductions were fantasies, born of guilt, of avenging aborted foetuses, likewise generated much polite heat, and some classic sarcasms in response from Stacy. Essentially, he was offering an hypothesis that would account for the figures in the infamous 1991 Roper Poll, since the huge number of abductions inferred simply wouldn’t support a strictly literal interpretation. (The inference was wrong anyway, but for some reason Gotlib never raised the poll or its interpretations in his pages.) Similarly, Steve Mizrach’s suggestion that abduction accounts were at least in part generated by ‘race fear’ attracted lively exchanges. Surprisingly, Mario Pazzaglini’s piece on alien writing didn’t seem to upset, or excite, anyone much – perhaps because he covered the problems so well there was nothing to add. At the time, it was little known that Budd Hopkins had collected a raft of samples of ‘alien writing’ that were remarkably similar. As far as we know, it’s yet to be revealed how this was achieved. Pazzaglini’s take on it would have been interesting.

It took five years for Gotlib to assemble this extraordinary collection, and it might take as long to read it, especially were one to follow up all the extracts and abstracts – never mind related work done since. But worth taking slowly. There’s not much here that’s gone out of date.

David Gotlib (ed), *Bulletin of Anomalous Experience*, 5 vols, 1990-1994

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Away with the fairies – or maybe not

Despite its obvious flaws, this study deserves to be read, not least because of Cutchin's points about altered states of consciousness and the difficulty in interpreting abductions with mystical elements

Thieves in the Night

A Brief History of Supernatural Child Abductions

Joshua Cutchin

Anomalist Books 2018

Pb, 451pp, notes, bib, ind, \$22.95, ISBN 9781938398957

A serious study of the folklore about supernaturally abducted children is welcome. Cutchin, who has written on 'supernatural' food and scents, has expended a huge amount of time and energy gathering the material for his attempt to view UFO-related abductions through a folkloric lens. He doesn't have far to look: fairies, demons, monsters, spirits and even Sasquatch have been blamed for transporting humans from one place to another. Where that destination is unknown, accounts have only an unexplained disappearance; because there seems to be no natural explanation, supernatural agency is assumed.

At first glance, Cutchin's content seems comprehensive. Twenty chapters cover an historical overview of abduction by fairies; the phenomena of supernatural abduction; changelings; fairy motives; prophylactics against fairy abduction; methods of retrieving the abducted; a medical and physiological description of changelings; paranormal child abduction as a global phenomenon; modern instances; abduction of children by aliens; the phenomena of alien abductions; missing foetuses; alien motives and the theory of hybridisation; prophylactics against alien abduction; abductions by aliens and fairies compared; and abduction by Sasquatch.

Although the subtitle claims

the work is "a brief history of supernatural child abductions", it's not arranged historically.

Cutchin's lens has a wide aperture. Nearly every page fires several accounts at the reader, moving on rapidly, leaping between different times, cultures and circumstances. Mentioning cases of similar phenomenology close to each other to suggest a common cause or shared relationship establishes nothing except similarity. It is a lazy method and has been the failing of many writers on fortean subjects, myself included. The cryptozoologist Bernard Heulvelmans dismissed it as "stamp collecting" if it failed to establish – satisfactorily – direct linguistic, cultural and phenomenological relationships.

Cutchin's bold attempt at a foundation for his fast-paced, data-packed chapters comes in the book's conclusion. Better late than never, he acknowledges the reader's gathering unease and admits that "It is naïve to assume any single solution could possibly account for the nuance embedded in these cases". Nevertheless, he believes he has demonstrated two important points: the phenomenological similarity between abductions recorded in UFO and fairy lore; and that the majority of his cited cases "seem to be physical encounters". This selection, no matter how large, is a personal one, made to prove a point, and not a serious analysis.

More interesting is Cutchin's addition of some new directions. He asks a deliberately provocative question: "What if changelings were simultaneously autistic, shamans, and abductees to the Otherworld?" Academics may wince at this collision of several

"What if changelings were simultaneously autistic, shamans and abductees to the Otherworld?"

different dynamic concepts, but he makes good points about the phenomenological relationships between some aspects of altered states of consciousness experienced by 'idiot savants', the autistic, the epileptic, the shaman's visionary journey and those children believed to have returned from the fairy realm.

It points to a familiar difficulty: how should we understand those accounts by returned UFO/alien abductees such as Betty Andreasson, whose narratives include shamanic, fairy, demonological, archetypal, mystical and other elements seemingly light years away from a supposed physical encounter with biological aliens and nuts-and-bolts technology? Another mystery needing study is how such an essentially subjective and internal experience can sometimes involve external 'effects', whether on the body (psychosomatically?) or 'actions' in the environment (levitation, poltergeists?) and whether the so-called physical relics of UFO encounters are related.

At the heart of this essentially subjective experience there is contact with something we can call (for want of any better word) the Other. For Cutchin, "the God of the Old Testament, the collective

human unconsciousness, extraterrestrials, the fae folk, an ecology of spirits, time travellers – all answers remain on the table". He managed to find, in the statement of UFO-related 'abduction experiencers', the description of an alien programme of deliberate incarnation into young people suffering from autism (p319). While he condemns disdain for people with developmental disabilities, I'm not sure many of them would be happy to be told they are alien-hybrids; however, Cutchin sees it as one of the chief positive signs of the Other's concern for the fate of humans.

The core of Cutchin's thesis lies in this idea, hinted at throughout the prior pages. He sees self-destruction all around us, in the lack of balance and rectitude in ourselves, our societies, our attitude to our planet, and in our general godless and moral abandon.

The abducted, then, are not necessarily victims, but agents of our psychological and spiritual revivification... if only we would listen. "We need more shamans", he declares, for only those 'spirited away' and returned with a message of hope can save us from disaster. Missing – deliberately, I think, because they detract from his thesis – are cases where this 'contact with or abduction by the Other' has had a destructive effect on its 'Chosen', depriving them of even the ability to function as a shaman.

Cutchin spends so much time and energy building up to his alien intervention thesis

Continued on p60



In the nature of robots

The variety and efficiency of animals' ways of optimising their biomechanics to survive point the way for engineering developments

How to Walk on Water and Climb up Walls

Animal Movement and the Robots of the Future

David L Hu

Princeton University Press 2018

Hb, 228pp, illus, ind, bib, \$24.95, ISBN 9780691169866

A dog shaking wet fur generates accelerations some 12 times the force of gravity, which removes up to 70% of the water in a fraction of a second – a feat spin dryers can't emulate. Analysis found that 12G was the minimum acceleration that removed the smallest water drops from the fur. David Hu, who discovered this example of evolutionary engineering, found that the same broadly applies across a 10,000-fold range of body masses from bears to mice: all generate about 12G. But as they're bigger and generate more centripetal force, bears shake four times a second. Mice shake 29 times a second.

How to Walk on Water and Climb Up Walls is packed with examples of how animals evolved to be efficient. The paradise tree snake (*Chrysopelea paradisi*), for example, can glide 100 metres after climbing a 50-metre tree, further from the same height than a flying squirrel. As Hu notes, at first sight, "The flying snake would seem as good a glider as a stick". But *Chrysopelea* has a trick: hinged ribs. When gliding, it expands the ribs, creating a triangular, slightly concave cross-section and doubling its width. This creates an aerofoil, the shape that gives a plane the lift to fly. In addition, *Chrysopelea* writhes in an S-shape while gliding, at a different frequency and amplitude than when moving on the ground. This generates vortices and the snake

may change shape to take advantage of the extra lift.

To take a less exotic example, most humans take around 20–30 seconds to urinate. Hu's team went to Atlanta Zoo and measured the time more than 40 animals took to urinate. More than 70% of the time, urination took 10 to 30 seconds, with an average of 21 seconds – yet an elephant's bladder is about 20 litres, some 100 times greater than that of a dog. But at most the elephant took twice as long.

This, if you'll excuse the expression, points at a fundamental evolutionary driver: the risk of falling prey.

A short urination reduces the risk of becoming a carnivore's lunch. But the flow of a fluid depends on the height and diameter of a pipe. A long urethra could be unwieldy, while a wide channel could allow parasites to enter. So evolution reaches a compromise: "five centimetres long and the width of a coffee stirrer" in adult women and "one meter long and the width of your fist" in female elephants. So, the duration of urination is similar.

Hu's fascinating book is packed with examples of the ways in which diverse animals – from how hairy legs help some insects walk on water to why dead salmon can swim – optimise their biomechanics to survive. This alone would have earned Hu's book a place on my reading pile. But this enjoyable – not an adjective I'd normally associate with a tome covering engineering and fluid mechanics – book demonstrates how these biological insights help engineers solve problems as varied as keeping the rain off windscreens, getting a robot to walk on sand and building exoskeletons.

Hu aimed this beguiling book at that most amorphous of audiences: the general reader.

I've various bits of paper that claim I'm a biologist – and I'm familiar with the biological themes and many of examples Hu uses. I had, however, only a passing appreciation of how engineers have mimicked and been inspired by animal motion. I was familiar with the consistency of urination and the aerodynamics of flying snakes. But I didn't know the 'backstory' to either, which is not only interesting but also, in Hu's easy style, humorous. So, while Hu might have aimed the book at the general reader, it's a fascinating read for scientists.

Hu also makes a more fundamental point. In 2016, his team was responsible for three of the 20 studies a US senator condemned as a waste of government money. Yet basic research can have unexpected benefits. Assessing urine flow in a clinic is technically difficult and expensive. After reading about Hu's study, a Japanese doctor wondered if urination time might be simpler indicator of urological health. He looked at 2,000 people and found that it increased from 21 seconds at 20 years of age to 31 seconds at 80 years. So, asking how long a person urinated may indicate who needs additional tests or an ultrasound. Researchers are working on devices to help alleviate urinary incontinence. Having a baseline for normal urination helps assess how well they work.

The ignorance of the importance of basic science is pervasive and disturbing. As Hu works at the interface of engineering and biology, and is such a compelling writer, I can think of no one better placed to advocate for science. I hope he turns to this topic in more detail in the future. In the meantime, you'll enjoy this stimulating book.

Mark Greener

★★★★★

Continued from p61

that it is a pity the book ends so suddenly on this hurried conclusion. Perhaps he intends to substantiate this in a further volume. Whether you agree or not, he is at least discussing interesting topics and meaningful correlations. He writes with passion and insight. I think he hitched his wagon to the 'alien intervention' thesis too quickly: had he marshalled his data better, other ideas might have emerged. However, 'believers' will love it, as it supplements the related message of Mike Clelland's *Stories from the Messengers: Owls, UFOs and a Deeper Reality* (2018). Sceptical materialists may follow their usual kneejerk instinct and not bother to read it. That would be a pity, as these ideas need a robust and scholastically honest discussion. Either way, it deserves to be read by any thoughtful person.

Bob Rickard

★★★★★

Strange Frequencies

The Extraordinary Story of the Technological Quest for the Supernatural

Peter Bebergal

TarcherPerigee 2018

Hb, 256pp, \$28.00, ISBN 9780143111825

What if you had to lie to get to the truth? In George P Hansen's *The Trickster and the Paranormal* (2001), the parapsychologist proposes that the sleight-of-hand and distracting stage patter Spiritualists and occultists used as part of their performances were essential to helping them produce real magic. The tricks they played on their audience got them to open their minds to the ineffable and helped create the conditions for otherworldly things to happen. Never mind what Terry Goodkind wrote: fake it until you make it is the wizard's first rule.

The idea that numinous forces need an intermediary or 'cheat' to intersect with our world runs through Peter Bebergal's latest book. He has long been fascinated by the ways the real world rubs shoulders with the otherworldly: he's written about how the occult helped shape rock music in 2014's *Season of the Witch*, and his memoir 2011



Too Much to Dream explores the connection between psychedelics and mysticism. In *Strange Frequencies*, Bebergal looks at another unlikely bedfellow of the paranormal: technology.

While our rationalist culture tends to view technology and the supernatural as diametrically opposed forces, Bebergal puts forth the provocative forerunner notion that the latter may need the former in order to be seen and heard. Our impulse to invent and tinker is “God’s method of acting directly on humanity”. He suggests we stop looking at things like spirit photography and EVP recordings as accidental records of (possible) supernatural phenomena and see them for what they are: apertures these liminal beings need in order to cross over and communicate with us.

Bebergal’s book takes us on a tour of technological mediums. Each chapter focuses on a different kind of technology and spiritual practice, with Bebergal offering historical context and conducting interviews with practitioners and inventors familiar with his subjects. *Strange Frequencies* covers a wide gamut of subjects, ranging from golems and automata to seances, spirit photography, EVP, and binaural beats.

Even the most well-read esoteric scholar will find some new and fascinating bit of lore in Bebergal’s book (like an anecdote about The Inquisition putting an automaton on trial in an attempt to get it to confess it’s a demonic device). Particular highlights include chapters focusing on the Spiritualist town of Lily Dale, Bebergal spending time in the workshop of automata restorer/horologist Brittany Cox, and the author’s own attempts at creating a ghost box to experience EVP phenomena firsthand.

Part of what makes *Strange Frequencies* such an engrossing read is that the book also chronicles the author’s conflicted feelings on his subjects. Bebergal maintains an open mind while attending seances, poring through spirit photography, and trying to

find signals in the EVP noise. He doesn’t just interview occult inventors; he tries to replicate their devices and findings on his own, with decidedly mixed results.

That hands-on approach keeps the book from getting dry. And as far as tour guides to the occult underworld go, you couldn’t ask for a better Virgil than Bebergal: his prose is warm, clever and erudite without being alienating. Read it with as open a mind as he wrote it and you’ll be bound to pick up a few interesting frequencies on your wavelength.

Ashley Naftule

★★★★★

The New Annotated Frankenstein

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, ed: Leslie Klinger, intro: Guillermo del Toro

Liveright 2018

Hb, 432 pp, illus, appxs, £27.00, ISBN 9780871409492

This is the 200th anniversary of the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s famous work of occult and Gothic horror, and arguably one of the initial works of what might be called science fiction. *The New Annotated Frankenstein* is a consummate work of scholarship. Like the

earlier *New Annotated HP Lovecraft* (2014), also edited by Leslie S Klinger, it’s beautiful and masterfully presented. And though there is no shortage of scholarly editions of *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (its full title), in both its 1818 and 1831 versions, Klinger’s edition deserves a place on any literature or horror aficionado’s shelf.

Klinger’s edition is also among the first mass market publications to account for the differences between Shelley’s superior 1818 version, published anonymously in an edition of 500 to little fanfare, and her heavily revised second edition, which is less gut-punching and morally ambiguous, and inexplicably the version with which most readers are familiar. In a Herculean example of textual analysis, Klinger reprints in the margins all the rewritten passages from the 1831 text, as well the non-Shelleyan, anonymously contributed variations from an interim 1823 edition, the first to credit Shelley as author and published after the success of

a stage adaptation that year. Reading the differing versions side by side enlightens the reader as to the extent which Shelley’s revisions diminish the immediacy and power of the original.

The story behind the composition of this masterpiece is itself a literary legend: Lord Byron challenged the then-17-year-old Mary Shelley, the lover of poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, to write a ghost story. They were at his villa at Lake Geneva in 1816, the “year without a summer” caused by the 1815 eruption of Mount Tambora, which also inspired Byron’s poem ‘Darkness’. Following a “waking dream”, Shelley composed the tale of tortured scientist Victor Frankenstein’s creation of a creature pieced together from corpses. Abandoned by his frightened creator, it stalks and terrorises, then interrogates, Frankenstein. *Frankenstein* ranks among the most bravura inaugural works of any English writer, a melodramatic adventure story and a breathtaking, breakneck thriller that culminates in a profound philosophic debate on love, solitude, friendship, and betrayal.

Though Shelley would write other works, including the watered-down revision, the 1818 version remains her masterpiece; indeed, it is still among the top-tier works of gothic horror produced in English. The creature, now synonymous with his creator’s surname, is, along with Sherlock Holmes and Count Dracula (on both of which Klinger has also produced notable annotated volumes), and a few select others, a cultural icon, and the subject of a variety of appropriations and interpretations, many of them cinematic. Filmmaker Guillermo del Toro provides the erudite introduction, and included in one of the volume’s many appendices is an overview of Frankenstein as depicted on film as well as an entertaining new interview with Mel Brooks, writer/director of the classic comedy *Young Frankenstein* (1974), wherein Brooks discusses the lasting cultural significance and onscreen presence of Shelley’s horrifying – and ultimately tragic – monster.

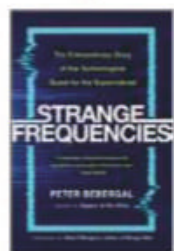
The New Annotated Frankenstein also discusses

the background of the novel; Shelley’s literary, scientific and personal inspirations; its composition, publication and initial impact; and its legacy. Klinger’s annotations are precise, incisive and comprehensive; this is the annotated edition to own. Also featured is a wideranging account of the scholarly readings and critical re-evaluations of the text as Christian allegory, with Frankenstein representing the Romantic view of Satan as Promethean hero wanting to replace God; as the vengeful and tragic Creature, who reads Milton and alternately describes himself as a new Adam and a fallen angel; and as metaphor for scientific hubris. It also mentions numerous psychoanalytic and feminist interpretations. Klinger absorbs these earlier scholarly perspectives, yet still manages to shine new light on some of the novel’s rather more dim recesses, though, admittedly, some annotations are more necessary than others; for example, exactly how does a detailed history of golf at St Andrews really benefit the reader of *Frankenstein*?

Shelley’s text is here complemented by an extensive historical introduction, providing biographies of all the major players (Shelley herself; her parents, feminist Mary Wollstonecraft and philosopher William Godwin; Percy Bysshe Shelley; and Lord Byron), and a detailed background of its composition. In keeping with the publisher’s previous annotated editions, there are copious illustrations; included are manuscript pages, engravings, theatre posters, film stills, and a variety of other images depicting the worlds of both Shelley and Frankenstein. Historical contexts are provided and enlarged upon, and obscure references are explained. Yet what remains the work’s principal appeal is its tone of existential dread. Though Shelley borrows liberally from Gothic and Romantic traditions and from earlier depictions of monsters in myth and legend (the Golem in particular), her novel and its creature remain distinctively *sui generis*, in possession of their own mythic stature. Essential.

Eric Hoffman

★★★★★



Technicolor life

The mercurial Victorian novelist, politician, mage and esoteric thinker is placed in context

Bulwer-Lytton, Occult Personality

A Graphic Introduction
John S Moore; design: Alistair Moore
Mandrake 2018
Pb, 166p, illus, appxs, ind, PRICE??, ISBN 9781906958855

Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer-Lytton (1803–73), thankfully known as Bulwer-Lytton, lived a full life, to say the least. Alongside his career as both a Whig and Conservative MP and Secretary of State for the Colonies, he was one of the successful writers of novels, plays and poems embracing historical and romantic fiction, and more esoteric narratives such as *Zanoni* (1842) and *The Coming Race* (1871). Add to this his dandyism, his refusal of the Greek crown and his residency in Craven Cottage, Fulham, and what we have is an ‘interesting’ character, assuredly of his time.

‘*A Graphic Introduction...*’ places Bulwer-Lytton at the centre of an exploration of the social and philosophical movements that dominated the 19th century intellectual scene. Moore attempts to demonstrate how the socially and educationally privileged Bulwer-Lytton was drawn to the occult and warranted his later reputation as a mage and esoteric thinker.

The book treads ground familiar to the student of magic and Victorian Britain. Sections on luminaries such as Eliphas Levi, Madame Blavatsky, Hargrave Jennings and Swedenborg are unsurprising, as is the material relating to issues that define Victorian life, utilitarianism, liberty and censure. Moore tackles alchemy, hermeticism, magic, symbolism and the influence of the Gothic tradition on everyday life in a chronological and understandable fashion. Bulwer-Lytton’s literary

output is explored further in the appendixes following a more general explication of his place within the canon of supernatural and mystical literature throughout the book. Other appended material includes an extract from *The Gypsy Girl* and a lecture presented by Moore as part of Bulwer’s bicentennial celebration in 2003.

For the reader interested in the origins of organisations such as the Golden Dawn and fellow travellers such as Rosicrucianism and Theosophy, and the advocacy of those such as Bulwer-Lytton of a magical Universe contrary to the drab metaphysics of religious orthodoxy, then this book provides a clear and accessible survey. For the more focused reader and student of the period, its magical and spiritual heritage and its cultural anthropology, *A Graphic Introduction...* may appear sketchy and somewhat lacking in analysis and description.

That said, it is an attractive production and attempts to consider the elaborate web of influences that informed Bulwer-Lytton throughout his life. All the key players of a heterogeneous century are name-checked and Bulwer-Lytton’s subsequent influence on premier league visionaries such as Aleister Crowley, Carl Jung and Timothy Leary are noted. Bulwer-Lytton was a complex and mercurial character; a learned adept, a veritable Siegfried, yet remembered as much for his pithy wordplay – the “great unwashed”, “the pen is mightier than the sword” – as for his spiritual evolution. An all-rounder of a book for the fortean library, confidently written and lavishly illustrated.

Chris Hill
★★★★★

Ramblings of Teenaged Cryptozoologists

Colin Schneider & Tyler Houck
Lulu.com 2018
Pb, 288pp, £17.64, ISBN 9780359024315

Cryptozoology as a field has one foot metaphorically on the ground while the other is being pulled off into the fantastical abyss by shapeshifters and interdimensional entities. This unbalanced state is reinforced by television shows, independent YouTubers and podcasters, and cryptozoological tourism vendors. What would Heuvelmans say about this situation?! Away from the social media enclaves that feature Chupacabras fan art and Bigfoot erotica, there remain a few individuals that ask the right questions and want to learn how to conduct solid research.

Ramblings of Teenaged Cryptozoologists provides a fresh and most welcome view of cryptozoology from two curious and sharp young minds. Schneider and Houck are American teens who appear to understand that not everything you see in the news is credible: it takes some digging to find out the real story, and situations are not usually as straightforward as they appear. With the openness to talk to anyone who will listen and the willingness to do some hard work, they have jointly published this book to share their exploration into cryptids.

Most of the book is derived from research into topics they explored for their websites, radio show, public talks, or articles published in the cryptozoological media. Each author describes his own entry into the field. The essays, written by one or the other individually, are short, and the print is large. There are a few reference citations (which is more than can be said for most popular cryptozoological content) to show that they get their information from actual books and even newspaper archives, not just web sources. At this early stage of their knowledge, they show engagement with higher-level ideas such as the unreliability of eyewitness accounts, potential for hoaxing, zoological evolution, and ecological plausibility.



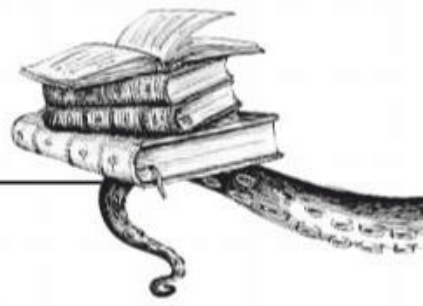
Both write with a strong tendency towards natural, non-sensational explanations for modern cryptid

conundrums such as dogmen and mysterious canids or the probability of survival of prehistoric animals. They deftly skirt the supernatural aspects that invariably pop up in these tales; however, they are admirably neutral about paranormal discourse. Through their words, you can see an evolution of thought, the process of working through the information piece by piece and making sense of it. The essay entitled ‘So You Want to be a Cryptozoologist’ is Schneider, a fresh-faced researcher experienced beyond his years, talking to would-be monster hunters of any age. Instead of coming off as arrogant or condescending, it is authentic, knowledgeable, and sincere. Houck’s treatments of the evidence for mystery ‘serpents’ of land and sea display an advanced aptitude for vertebrate zoology for someone not yet in college. I am pleasantly reminded of the most excellent use of the Internet to make connections with world experts of all stripes, which is clearly what these two have strategically done to produce such work.

The treatment of topics is limited in this short collection, but still enjoyable for those of us who were adults before Schneider and Houck were born. As they become more experienced, they will need to find more original and academic sources to support their conclusions.

Like most self-published books, this one contains several typos. Yet, this collection stands above similar books in terms of quality, originality, and sophistication of content. The seasoned researcher will not find much new here (except perhaps hope for the future), but you should definitely pass this book to any eager young cryptid enthusiast.

I expect pretty great things to come from these two, no matter what careers they eventually pursue.
Sharon Hill
★★★★★



ALSO RECEIVED

WE LEAF THROUGH A SMALL SELECTION OF THE DOZENS OF BOOKS THAT HAVE ARRIVED AT FORTEAN TOWERS IN RECENT MONTHS...

Seven Years of Grace

The Inspired Mission of Achsa W Sprague

Sara Rath

Vermont Historical Society 2016
Pb, 455pp, illus, notes, \$24.95, ISBN 9780934720663

In the decade before the American Civil War, a young woman named Achsa Sprague toured the States with a lecture programme promoting women’s rights, the abolition of slavery, prison reform, and Spiritualism; one of a small number of itinerant female lecturers. Over seven years, she performed as a medium, singing hymns and speaking in a trance state. She attracted audiences of thousands and staunchly faced the hecklers and sceptics drawn to such events. As a shy, sickly girl, she was barely tolerated by a drunken father. In November 1852, she had a vision of angels which gave her the sense of purpose she longed for. She embraced the Spiritualist movement and began lecturing. Sara Rath brings Sprague to life using documentation from the Vermont Historical Society and other archives, but as a novel. It works well and illuminates a curious but influential strand of antebellum America.

Origins of the Sphinx

Celestial Guardian of Pre-Pharaonic Civilization

Robert M. Schoch And Robert Bauval

Inner Traditions 2017
Pb, 528pp, illus, bib, ind, \$24.95, ISBN 9781620555255

If any writers are favourites to solve the riddle of the Great Sphinx of Giza it must be Schoch and Bauval. Both are veteran “Egyptology outsiders” with many provocative books discussing ancient civilisations in general and Egypt in particular, and appear here in what the blurb calls “a provocative collaboration” exploring their conviction that the Sphinx is far older than the accepted timeline of Egyptology allows. The orthodox view holds that it was erected

around 2500 BC as a memorial to pharaoh Khafre. The authors disagree. They first show how there is no supportive evidence for this opinion and set out to discover the true ‘when’ and, just as importantly, ‘why’ in a tightly argued dialogue of articles. Schoch’s updates his well-known theory that an earlier date can be derived from studying the water-weathering patterns on the monument, adding new seismic and geological data. Bauval extends his own publicised theory about the constellations of Orion and Leo being used in ancient times to orient important structures. Together, they summarise the significant evidence for an older construction phase at Giza and conclude that the original monument was restored and recarved during the Old Kingdom era. That earlier construction, they demonstrate, was by “an advanced pre-Pharaonic civilisation that existed circa 12,000 years ago” and was contemporaneous with the fascinating Göbekli Tepe complex in Turkey. Schoch and Bauval present a well-written, well-argued and well-illustrated thesis (including 16 colour plates) which deserves serious consideration.

Levitation

The Science, Myth and Magic of Suspension

Peter Adey

Reaktion Books 2017
Hb, 296pp, illus, refs, ind, £20.00, ISBN 9781780237374

This wide-ranging and well-illustrated study is not so much about incidents of levitation as about the ideas of floating, rising up and moving through the air, drawing examples from philosophy, religion, magic, science and popular culture. Adey, a professor of Human Geography at the University of London, writes engagingly as he reveals the remarkable depth and extent of these ideas, how they have become embedded in human society, and how they have manifested or been expressed. From the power of ascetic saints and surrealist art to flying superheroes and astronauts in null-gravity, through

today’s CGI tricks with camera or computer, and even further into the future with hovering cities, Adey keeps you thinking. Behind our spiritual, imaginative and scientific lives, the idea of levitation symbolises nothing less than an epiphany, our release from (or triumph over) those forces that ground us or hold us back, at the same time revealing the unlimited prospects ahead of us.

Hauntings, Horrors and Dancing with the Dead

True Stories From The Voodoo Queen Of New Orleans

Bloody Mary

Red Wheel Weiser 2016
Pb, 288pp, illus, bib, \$19.95, ISBN 9781578635665

The author behind the persona claims to be an 11th generation Creole woman, born in New Orleans and raised in the traditions of both Catholicism and Voodoo, and once a disciple of the late Marie Laveau, the original Voodoo Queen. In her role as a *mamaissi* (an African river priestess) and a Haitian Voodoo *asogwe*, she says she conducts all kinds of ceremonies as an intermediary between the living and the dead, including acting as a psychopomp for lost souls, weddings, burials and baptisms. While the book is an unashamed advertisement for her services, it is also a collection of stories of her adventures in the shadow world around New Orleans.

Energy, Cold Fusion & Antigravity

Frank Znidarsic

Amazon 2017
Pb, 133pp, illus, bib, £10.45, ISBN 9781480270237

As forteans we applaud science mavericks with their self-published theories, whose strident and self-important tones often drown out the intended message of their particular inventions, creations or discoveries. The hope is that among the ‘wacky’ and unorthodox there might be,

some day, an insight which will properly challenge orthodox science. Author Znidarsic is a professional electrical engineer who, for years, has monitored claims in the field of cold fusion and ‘anti-gravitational’ experiments. Here he explains why he thinks these might work and how they might be applied. Hopefully, some scientists will read it and respond. If he is in error, learning precisely why might be more informative than the usual blanking such papers get from the Establishment.

The Next Fifty Years

Science in the First Half of the Twenty-First Century

John Brockman, ed.

Weidenfeld and Nicholson 2002
Hb, 301pp, £12.99, ISBN 9780297829256

A bit late with this one, but it is worth the mention. Brockman, publisher of *Edge*, the online forum for scientists, presents an anthology of short essays by 25 leading specialists in the major sciences. The topic divided the book into two sections, dealing with theoretical and practical aspects of the future. A brief tour of the first topics includes ‘What is life?’ ‘Can minds be swapped?’ ‘Moral development?’ ‘What children can teach scientists’ and ‘Can science understand sadness?’. The second part includes ‘How genesis might work on other planets’, ‘Merging flesh and machine’, ‘Will we get smarter?’, ‘Rethinking the mind-brain problem’, ‘Understanding matter and complexity’, ‘Interactive clothing’, ‘The changing nature of humanity’, and a cracking piece by Richard Dawkins on measuring scientific and other advancements. Brockman was inspired by a 1951 Reith lecture by the biologist JZ Young, who said: “We are going through a rapidly accelerating epistemological sea change and using unprecedentedly powerful tools. What we have lacked is an intellectual culture able to transform its own premises as fast as our technologies are transforming us.” The contributors attempt to sketch out what that culture might be from their own specialities. Good thoughtful science writing.

SEND REVIEW DISCS TO: FORTEAN TIMES, PO BOX 71602, LONDON E17 0QD, UK.

Lost in the labyrinth

Actor Bill Watterson's quirky feature debut makes it to the UK at last and proves to be a wildly inventive and sweet-natured blend of live-action adventure, puppetry and colourful animation



Dave Made a Maze

Dir Bill Watterson, US 2017
Arrow Films, £18.99 (Blu-ray) + VOD

One of the most wildly imaginative films I have seen in a long time, *Dave Made a Maze* combines boundless creativity, a classic adventure narrative and a kooky sensibility to produce something that feels both fresh and timeless – and likely destined to become a modern cult classic.

The basic premise is outwardly very simple: under-achieving Dave (Nick Thune) builds a cardboard maze in his apartment while long-suffering girlfriend Annie (Meera Rohit Kumbhani) is out of town. On her return, she finds Dave trapped in his own creation which, Tardis style, is much, much larger on the inside than the outside. She and some friends, including a documentary film crew, enter the labyrinth – despite Dave's warnings that it is littered with booby traps – in an attempt to rescue him.

The titular maze – more accurately a labyrinth, as Dave's laconic friend Gordon (Adam Busch) points out – is the real star of the show. It's whimsical,

On her return, his girlfriend finds Dave trapped in his own creation

surreal and deadly in equal measure: there is a room designed around a deck of playing cards, a room which contains multiple forced perspective tricks, a giant, pulsating vagina, and, even more fearsome than that, a minotaur. The maze performs the same function as the fantasy settings of *Oz*, *Wonderland* and the Kingdom of Wisdom (the latter being from Norton Juster's less familiar but equally wonderful *The Phantom Tollbooth*); that is to say, it is an allegorical world for the hero to explore and escape from while discovering who he is.

The film versions of these classic tales stand or fall by the standard of the production design and *Dave Made a Maze* is no different. It's a tribute to the art and design teams who worked on the film that their creation is a marvel, all the more so for being

seemingly made entirely out of cardboard and coloured paper; it's the kind of film you watch and think to yourself, "Blimey I'd like to have a muck about on that set!"

It's not just a design classic, though. Long-time actor but first-time director Bill Watterson uses a variety of cinematic styles to tell the story. There is the live action element, which makes up the bulk of the film, as well as animation and puppetry. He also plays around with colour and costumes, particularly in a memorable sequence where Dave and Annie have a conversation at their breakfast bar.

More often than not, stories of this nature are centred on spirited children – Alice, Dorothy Gale, or even *The Goonies* – but Watterson makes his film feel more current by instead focusing on a collection of layabouts, hipsters and arty-farty types. The narrative focus, though, is fundamentally on the loving but awkward relationship between a man and his girlfriend; and it is sweetly done, giving the film a grounding in reality necessary to contrast with the weird stuff going on elsewhere.

If I were nit-picking I'd say the script could perhaps have been a bit funnier and that some of the performances are quite broad (perhaps to compensate); but I have absolutely no hesitation in recommending this, especially if you like the work of people such as Terry Gilliam, Michel Gondry and Spike Jonze.

Daniel King



Upgrade

Dir Leigh Whannell, Australia 2018
Universal Pictures, £9.99 (DVD)

AI gone mad, cyborgs, a near future dystopia: the ideas in *Upgrade* are not new, but it's the variations on these themes which produce a fresh and enjoyable synthesis. In the near future, Grey (Logan Marshall-Green) refurbishes old sports cars for clients, while his partner Aisha (Melanie Vallejo) works for a tech company. She accompanies Grey when he delivers a car to client Eron Keen (Harrison Gilbertson), an IT billionaire. On the way home, her autopilot car is hacked and crashes and the couple are attacked by a gang of cyborgs; Aisha is killed and Grey ends up quadriplegic.

Keen offers Grey a new implant chip, Stem (voiced by Simon Maiden), which has AI capabilities and will provide an interface between his brain and the rest of his central nervous system, allowing him the use of his limbs again. However, the AI speaks to Grey and seems to have opinions of its own. When Grey allows it to take over, it turns him into a fast-moving killing machine. Using online resources and old style detective work, Grey and a non-binary hacker (Kai Bradley) start to track down the gang who killed his wife – and the first one they find meets a grisly death. A detective (Betty Gabriel) who has been investigating the



original attack gets suspicious about Grey, as does Keen.

Here we have *Robocop* meets *2001's Hal* meets *Blade Runner* meets *Terminator* meets *Frankenstein*, with touches of *Ex Machina* and *Minority Report*. But these influences blend into a whole which is very much its own film. Marshall-Green portrays Grey as a credible character, the film's *Blade Runner*-style future – full of body modifications and police drones – is effectively imagined, and the fights between Grey and the cyborgs are gruesome but well choreographed.

Directed and written by Leigh Whannell, *Upgrade* is a superior sci-fi horror with some disturbing scenes: not for the squeamish.

Páiric O'Corráin



Death Line

Dir Gary Sherman, UK 1972
Network, £14.99 (Blu-ray)

Death Line, also known as *Raw Meat*, is justly renowned as one of the very best British horror films. Telling the story of a young couple who get involved in a mysterious missing person case on the London Underground, it is a rare example of the kind of film that hits its targets so perfectly that the result is something which lingers long in the mind. Apart from the rather bland leads, the cast is superb, particularly Donald Pleasence and Norman Rossington as the police duo leading the investigation. Both rein it in far more than you'd expect and, as a result, give two of their most winning performances. This Blu-ray transfer is crisp and clear, and to my eye the film looks better than ever. Less so the sound: it's one of those discs where the music is very loud and the dialogue slightly muffled, so you have to crank up the volume during dialogue scenes and frantically turn it down when a blast of music parps up. There's little by way of extras beyond a 15-minute reminiscence by actor Hugh Armstrong, who outperforms everyone else in the role of the film's tragic bogeyman. However, I'd have no reservations about recommending this disc: it's a great film that looks superb.

Daniel King



THE REVEREND'S REVIEW

FT's resident man of the cloth REVEREND PETER LAWS dons his dog collar and faces the flicks that Church forgot! (www.theflicksthatchurchforgot.com)

When a Stranger Calls/When a Stranger Calls Back

Dir Fred Walton, US 1979/1993
Second Sight, £19.99 (Blu-ray)

Opera

Dir Dario Argento, Italy 1987
Cult Films £14.99 (Dual Format)

The Case of the Bloody Iris

Dir Giuliano Carnimeo, Italy 1972
Shameless, £14.99 (Blu-ray), £12.99 (DVD)

Miss Leslie's Dolls

Dir Joseph G Prieto, US 1973
Second Sight, £12.99 (Blu-ray), £9.99 (DVD)

Nothing says (a belated) Happy New Year like a deranged, sweaty psychopath piling up cadavers. So why not kick off 2019 with the zany exploits of no less than five crazed killers?

Heading up this murderous mob is a soft-spoken Englishman who turned the innocent phrase "Have you checked the children?" into a pant-wetting whisper of terror. The first 20 minutes of *When A Stranger Calls* terrified audiences. I remember playing it to friends on VHS, just to freak them out. It's such a masterful babysitter-in-peril



Haunted locations have a built-in sense of tragedy and sadness

sequence that the rest of the film fades from memory – its uneven, episodic approach never quite matches that opening terror salvo. It's quite the surprise to find that the 1993 TV movie sequel, *When a Stranger Calls Back*, is a slightly more cohesive thriller. Sure, the killer's gimmick is a bit silly, and yes, Carol Kane's baggy power suits are a nightmare unto themselves, but the inventive, deadpan approach made my skin prickle a bit.



In a good way. Second Sight have released both *Strangers* in one HD package, which even features the original short movie, *The Sitter*, which inspired it all.

The screams continue with director Dario Argento, who cranks up the violence with *Opera*, from 1987. Here, the killer isn't just content with murdering folk. He forces others to watch. And to make sure they don't look away, he straps their foreheads to a post and sellotapes a row of needles under their eyes. Blink, and you're done for. It's a typically sadistic flourish from a director who likes things over the top; as when Iron Maiden-style metal bursts forth whenever a knife slams into a body. Yet Argento's visual flair and technical skill still delights. Watch for the close up of a bullet firing down the barrel of a gun. Totally unnecessary, but totally welcome. Italians continue to die stylishly in *The Case of the Bloody Iris* (below), a *giallo* movie in which a model notices her fellow apartment tenants keep getting murdered. Will she be next? Of course she will! Will there be black gloves and endless red herrings? Of course there will! Will there be groovy music... etc... etc. Great fun.

Last in this long line of loons is a drag queen who kindly allows teens (and their horny teacher) to stay the night during a terrible storm. But when Miss Leslie reveals her collection of life-like dolls and starts chopping up her guests with an axe, they wish they'd stayed out in the rain. This ultra-low budget sleaze-fest feels like a Herschell Gordon Lewis movie, and there's a level of tension in the early scenes that had me rather gripped. True... equating trans people with criminal psychopathy isn't exactly 'woke', but taken as a product of its time, this cheap, and potentially offensive, exploitation flick makes for a surprisingly atmospheric 85 minutes.



SOUNDS PECULIAR BRIAN J ROBB PRESENTS THE FORTEAN TIMES PODCAST COLUMN

As a medium, podcasts have been enjoying something of a boom over the past few years. The democratisation of quality media production through high-specification computer equipment has allowed a plethora of previously marginalised voices their own access to what were once quaintly called ‘the airwaves’.

In the past, broadcasting (reaching a wide audience from a single source) was heavily regulated and controlled, mainly through frequency scarcity: only those authorised or licensed to have access to the airwaves were allowed to broadcast. In UK terms that, initially, meant the BBC, with commercial stations coming along in the 1960s.

In terms of radio, there have been amateurs since the invention of the medium, reaching a crescendo with the offshore ‘pirate’ pop stations of the 1960s that ultimately led to the BBC launching Radio 1. For the longest time, Radio 4 (or NPR in the US) has been the default home of quality ‘spoken word’ content, whether that was drama, current affairs, or documentary radio.

Now, anyone with a microphone and an iPad, laptop, or computer and the right software can produce a decent podcast and launch their work onto a waiting world. Not all of them are good, while many are far better than you might expect, sometimes surpassing the productions of ‘legitimate’ broadcasters like the BBC or NPR. When it comes to fortean topics, there are a host of podcasts out there, ranging from the polished and compelling to the amateurish and downright weird. SOUNDS PECULIAR is your insider guide to the best of the current podcasts dealing with fortean topics: all you have to do is sit back and listen...



Podcast: Haunted Places
www.parcast.com/haunted
Host: Greg Polcyn
Episode Count: 50+
Format: Storytelling, dramatised events testimony, guest interviews
Established: October 2017
Frequency: Fortnightly
Topics: Hauntings

An exploration of locations marked by supernatural events and happenings, *Haunted Places* describes each new episode as offering listeners “an audio tour of a new haunted place, and its haunted history. Spooky legends, weird histories, and tales of the supernatural... Listen at your own risk.” From the same team at Cutler Media that produced *Cults* (FT373:66), *Haunted Places* is a similarly slick production, but improves on *Cults* in that it is presented solo by Greg Polcyn, thus avoiding the sometimes fake-sounding chat between co-hosts that became so annoying on the earlier show.

Polcyn is a great storyteller (even if he sometimes over-eggs this spooky pudding), and *Haunted Places* augments his solo voice storytelling with atmospheric background sounds and music and the occasional semi-dramatised scene. This is all greatly effective (especially if you listen with headphones in the dark), bringing to life the locations that the show highlights.

Haunted Places launched with an obvious first location: the infamous Cecil Hotel in Los Angeles (a subject also tackled by the *Generation Why* podcast; FT369:68). The history of the hotel, the fact that it became a haunt for several notorious serial killers, and the still unsolved Elisa Lam case are all covered. Hotels are obviously popular haunted sites, and pop up repeatedly, including in episodes #8 (Driskill Hotel, Austin, Texas), #39 (Hotel del Salto, Colombia), and #32 (Hotel Monte Vista, Flagstaff, Arizona, purportedly haunted by a bank robber).

The range of the podcast is quickly shown by the second instalment, which delves deep into history and voodoo to explore Marie Laveau’s Cottage in the French Quarter of New Orleans. The history of the so-called Voodoo Queen is laid out (including her possible replacement by her own daughter), while the background

details of voodoo itself are lightly sketched in. From there, *Haunted Places* travels far and wide.

Cemeteries are an obvious proposition, and are covered in episodes #3 (La Recoleta Cemetery, Argentina) and #4 (The Catacombs of Paris, in a particularly well-produced instalment). Castles are also popular places for ghosts to hang out, and are dutifully covered in episodes #20 (Leap Castle, a 16th century edifice in Ireland, previously featured on *Most Haunted*), #25 (Ruthin Castle, Wales, said to be haunted by a Grey Lady, a soldier, and a young girl with golden ringlets), #26 (Edinburgh Castle, Scotland), #29 (Chateau de Chateaubriant, France), #36 (Moosham Castle, Austria, plagued by witches), and #45 (featuring the granddaddy of haunted castles, Glamis Castle in Angus, Scotland, home of the notorious ‘monster’, possibly a deformed member of the Royal family).

Each of these places has many stories attached to it, and Polcyn spends each half-hour or so outlining the accepted history of the building, exploring the things that are agreed upon before venturing off the beaten track to highlight those stories not found in the ‘serious’ history books. Conjuring up the atmosphere of each

location (especially effective in an underground maze like the Catacombs of Paris, or a desolate, cold stone castle like that of Glamis), each episode explores what the source of any haunting might be – who were the historic characters that might explain the sightings people report from these notorious places?

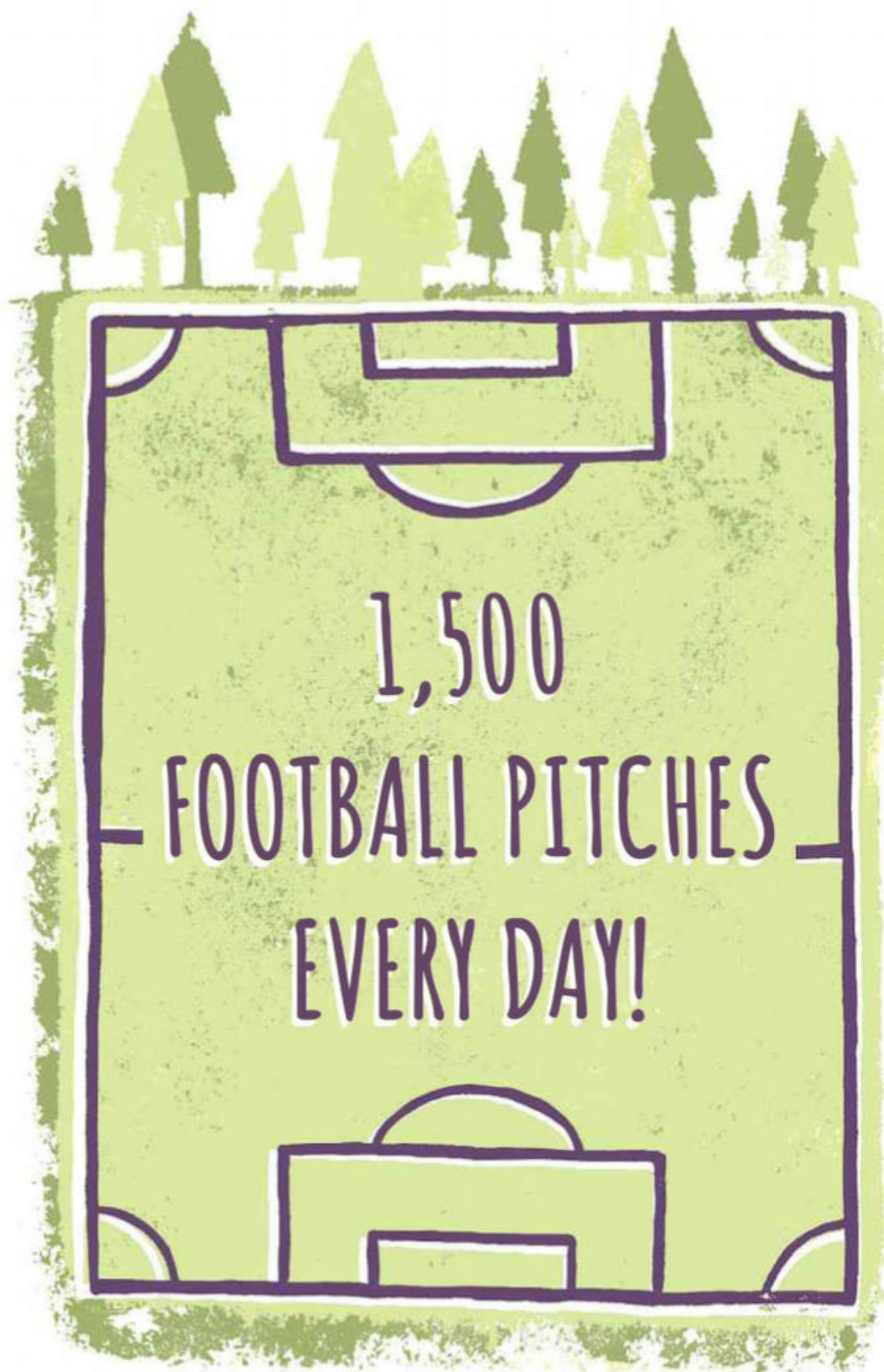
Some of the best episodes are those that explore lesser-known locales or ones that are surprising candidates for hauntings. Theatres are accepted locations for ghost sightings (Ep#5, The Birdcage Theatre, Tombstone, Arizona; Ep#7, Princess Theatre, Melbourne, Australia) – after all, theatrical types have often been partial to supernatural tales – but what about a distillery (Ep#38, Moss Beach Distillery, a major prohibition location), a public library (Ep#42, Harvey Public Library, North Dakota) or a ship (Ep#41, the *Queen Mary*, now a floating hotel and museum)? Other oddball locations include a courthouse (Ep#35, Calcasieu Courthouse, Louisiana), a forest in the shadow of Japan’s Mt. Fuji (Ep#34, Aokigahara), and a bar in New Orleans’s Bourbon Street (Ep#22, Lafitte’s Blacksmith Shop Bar). You may well need a stiff drink after listening to some of the spooky stories told by *Haunted Places*.

Strengths: Great atmosphere and background effects accompany each tale.

Weaknesses: Sometimes the host can overdo the import of the mystery.

Recommended Episodes: Ep#6 *Island of Dolls* (exploring the canals of Xochimilco, Mexico City); Ep#9 *Tower of London* (tales of imprisonment, torture, and murder; this one has it all!); Ep#13 *Gettysburg Battlefield* (it may be a National Park, but that doesn’t mean it’s not haunted); Ep#15 *The Sultan’s Palace* (another New Orleans tale, visiting a site the locals avoid); Ep#17 *The Winchester Mystery House* (a perennial favourite).

Verdict: Polished – indeed, maybe a bit too slick – but compelling.



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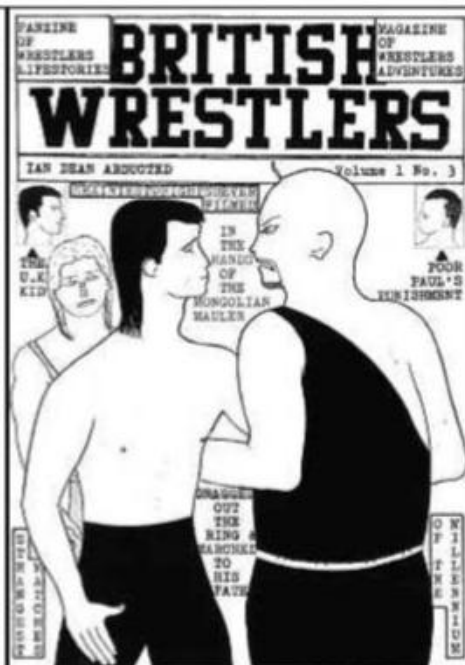
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LETTERS

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Billy Hope

I enjoyed Gerald O'Hara's spirit photography cover story [FT375:34-40], both for its grass-roots approach to social history in focusing on one group, the York Spiritualist Church, and for the mysterious and evocative images reproduced from the York Album.


The article states that Billy Hope and his Crewe Circle were challenged by the SPR and later by Harry Price. The SPR's 1922 investigation into Hope's spirit photography was actually a collaboration between Harry Price and Dr Eric Dingwall. As SPR Research Officer, Dingwall had been trying unsuccessfully to attend one of Hope's sittings. As a well-known sceptic, he was not welcome. Price, however, was able to gain entry, upon production of a letter of introduction from the Librarian of the London Spiritualist Alliance (in whose building he was renting several rooms for his offices).

O'Hara correctly observes that sitters were asked to bring their own photographic plates, thus offering some reassurance against fraud. Price's plates had been discreetly marked by X-ray, with the manufacturer's logo invisible until the print was developed. One of Hope's prints shows Price seated in a chair, an enigmatic-looking spirit lady standing to his left. Upon examination, Price saw that the logo wasn't present. He therefore concluded that Hope must have switched plates at some point, and produced the images by double exposure. Price (like Dingwall) was a member of the Magic Circle, and was therefore familiar with conjurers' sleight-of-hand misdirection techniques, although he couldn't say exactly when this had taken place.

Price and Dingwall's report on the case, published in the *SPR Journal* for May 1922, and later as a booklet ("Cold Light on Spiritualistic 'Phenomena'"), caused a sensation. Pro- and anti-Hope factions argued their respective corners for some years to come.

Their joint investigation helped propel Price and Dingwall to the forefront of British psychical research; it was their first big success; but their newfound friendship later degenerated into

SIMULACRA CORNER



Richmond tree

Geraint Davies's wife Jacqui spotted this tree face (or is it an Ent?) in Richmond Park, London.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to Fortean Times, PO Box 2409, London NW5 4NP or to sieveking@forteantimes.com.

bickering and hostility, an on-off feud played out in public and private.

It was also a cause of regret for Price that the Hope affair had created an irrevocable rift between himself and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, staunch defender of Spiritualism and its practitioners. On 9 August 1922 the *Evening Standard* published a letter from Conan Doyle outlining what he regarded as flaws in the investigators' methods. In a letter to Houdini that same year, he wrote "I am sure now that there was trickery," i.e. trickery by Price and Dingwall! He later attempted to have Price evicted from the London Spiritualist Alliance offices.

Finally, it is interesting to note that, despite Price and Dingwall's belief that they had conclusively proved him a fraud, Billy Hope continued to attract customers. Their 1922 report had received worldwide coverage. Nevertheless, as O'Hara shows, the photographs in the York Album were taken in 1930 and 1932. Evidently, many people were still eager to

be photographed by him, and perhaps be given physical proof of the continued existence of a loved one.

Christopher Josiffe
London

Banshees

I enjoyed James Riley's article on banshees [FT373:49], but failed to see why he attempted to make a connection between harbingers and the homeless. One is an invulnerable, supernatural messenger; the other is vulnerable, in a desperate situation and, far from being supernatural, is at great risk of exposure. Unlike a homeless person, the banshee is not desperate nor does it indiscriminately approach people from a given neighbourhood, begging for food and shelter. And as ably demonstrated by those living in Burnard Crescent, a homeless person can usually be kept out and avoided by a locked front door, while a banshee cannot.

While it is good to draw attention to the classical works of Yeats

and Scott, it is equally useful to look at potential cases from a much more recent time. I read about one that allegedly took place in 2009/10 where a woman, who had been living for just over a year with her family in a converted Croft house in the Orkney Isles, was sitting at a computer one day when she became disturbed by "the very loud sounds of a woman sobbing". <<https://www.yourghoststories.com/real-ghost-story.php?story=24963>> The sounds appeared to be coming from her son's bedroom, adjacent to where she was sitting. The sobbing intensified until it became "a heart-wrenching wail, it grew so loud I had no doubt in my mind that this woman had suffered a terrible loss of some kind." <<https://www.yourghoststories.com/real-ghost-story.php?story=24963>> As soon as the wailing stopped, she investigated and found nobody in her son's bedroom. The rest of the house was unoccupied while outside "not a single branch or blade of grass was moving... unusual in itself, considering our location." <<https://www.yourghoststories.com/real-ghost-story.php?story=24963>>. Just a few months later her own daughter tragically lost a premature baby.

Intrigued by this story, considering the various aspects of this haunting and the tragedy that followed soon after, I asked this woman whether she thought what she heard might have been a banshee. She told me that although she had read of them, she still hadn't quite made up her mind. It would be interesting to note if there was, perhaps, some Milesian connection with this woman's family.

Brad Evans
By email

Wrong calendar

Contrary to the caption, the calendar pictured in your 'late post' roundup [FT374:20] is not the 1950 Pennsylvania Railroad calendar. The cover artwork for the PRR calendar for 1950, by Grif Teller, shows trains on or near the Rockville Bridge over the Susquehanna River. In the foreground is a class J 2-10-4 freight locomotive.

Anita Blackman
Methey, West Yorkshire

Saint Padre Pio

The article on the renowned Jesuit forerunner, Father Herbert Thurston SJ [FT374:56-57], was an excellent account of his life and interests save for the repetition of the old canard that St Padre Pio's stigmata was the result of using carbolic acid. As far back as 1919 this was discredited, as the acid was ordered by the Capuchin Friars to sterilise needles used to inoculate them against the Spanish flu that was sweeping Europe in the aftermath of World War I. At the same period, Pio's wounds were examined by Dr Amico Bignami of the University of Rome, known as a noted agnostic and secularist. He found the stigmata wounds were unusually smooth, with a lack of edema. His advice was that the stigmata wounds be bandaged for eight days in order to compel them to heal. This Padre Pio and the Friars agreed to.

After eight days, Dr Bignami removed the bandages and it was found that far from healing, the blood flow from the wounds had exacerbated and was even worse than before. Of course, Fr Thurston may be correct that in a religious community autosuggestion may have played a part, even subconsciously – yet this does not explain the fact that on Padre Pio's death his stigmatic wounds did heal, leaving no scars – so there appears to be a supernatural dimension to his phenomena.

Andrew Jonathan Doig,
Member of the Third Order of the Society of St Francis
By email



"What do you reckon to these new hybrid vehicles?"

Will to live

Regarding the report about people apparently dying of a kind of apathy [FT374:80]. Well, I realise this is not quite the same, but I have known several elderly folk, who, having had hip replacements and finding themselves facing a long, slow convalescence, have just given up the fight and died. It is as if they lose their spirit. One actually said she was tired and wanted to pass on to the next life. Perhaps this bears out the notion that we all need to have the will to live to continue to do so.

Pamela Thornton
Llandegla, Denbighshire

Liminal ghosts

Tony Sandy asks: "Are stairs a common location for ghost sightings?" [FT373:71]. Stairways, at least symbolically speaking, can be regarded as liminal areas between different living spaces and that, in the case of ghost sightings, might be seen as a metaphor for a kind of transitory state of existence. In other words, neither alive nor truly dead, the ghost that is seen on the stairwell might be deemed as ascending towards a new or "higher state of existence" – or, as Jean Chevalier & Alain Gheerbrant note in their 1996 classic *Dictionary of Symbols* (p.580): "Ladders (and stairways) are pre-eminently symbols of ascension and realization of potential, related to the symbolism of verticality. However, they display a gradual ascension and a channel of communication, in both directions, between different levels (of existence)." Further to this idea, in art, not only do stairways represent this kind of "spiritual ascension" but they "are also symbols of the intercommunication and the comings and goings between Heaven and Earth." The great Romanian mythographer and philosopher Mircea Eliade also regards all ascension symbols (ladders, ropes, stairways, etc.) as signifying a "transcending of the human and a penetration into higher cosmic levels" (*Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 1958, p108).

It is interesting to note that, in psychoanalytical dream analysis, climbing stairways can "engender terror, fear and anxiety" (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, op. cit., p584) and that the returning ghost symbolises "the fears of beings who dwell in another world" (op. cit., p.530) and so sighting a ghost on a set of stairs would seem to be a perfectly natural (or unnatural?) place to have such an encounter; that is, if one puts any stock in the idea that there is a relationship between the paranormal and the human unconscious and that there might be a symbolic interplay between the two that sometimes manifests in the physical world.

Trevor Ouellette
North Bay, Ontario

Ghosts are often seen on stairs, which are liminal or transitional places. Liminal points (OED definition: Occupying a position at, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold) are where the situation changes, so wells and rivers go from wet to dry – they cross the boundary between the two states. Stairs go from down to up (and vice versa) and caves go from the surface world to the depths of the earth. This is often acknowledged (certainly in archaeology) as the reason why we have burials in caves, why we throw pennies into fountains and wishing wells, why bogs (another transition between dry and wet) have bog bodies and why we also see ghosts on stairs – they follow the liminality of the place. We buried bodies in caves and bogs and in pools because it was the quickest way to have the person access the other side and plead with the spirits, also allowing the spirits to directly contact our world – and why we often see ghosts in doorways and stairs. Stairs are also the most popularly used parts of a house and often the least likely to be changed in remodelling. If you subscribe to the loop theory of ghosts, then they are likely to have used the stairs most often in life crossing the liminal point; therefore more likely to trigger the loop to show the ghost in later times.

Richildis Tonks
By email

I think John Keel talks briefly about ghosts on the stairs in *Mothman Prophecies*, pointing out that expectation can play a role in seeing apparitions. When a routine-avid citizen, who walks around the park like clockwork every day in a cloak and hat, finally dies, people may "insert" his missing routine into their experience. There is also the expectation we receive from folklore, as we find with the poem *Antigonish* by William Hughes Mearns (1875-1965): "As I was going up the stair, I met a man who wasn't there..."

James Wright
Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

Editor's note: Mearns's poem Antigonish begins: "As I was going up the stair, / I met a man who wasn't there! / He wasn't there again today, / Oh how I wish he'd go away! / When I came home last night at three, / The man was waiting there for me / But when I looked around the hall, / I couldn't see him there at all!"

The poem was written in about 1899, inspired by reports of a man's ghost roaming the stairs of a haunted house in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. In 1939 Harold Adamson turned it into a popular song, recorded by the Glen Miller Orchestra, sung by Tex Beneke. It reached number seven on Your Hit Parade.

Regarding Tony Sandy's letter on stairs and ghosts: back in the 1960s, my friend Mike told me the following story, set in Hay-on-Wye where I was born. Mike was part of a big family in the town. The story concerned two of his many cousins, a girl and her much younger brother, who visited a woman they knew in the town, probably in her 60s, whose elderly mother had passed away sometime before. I presume there was no family connection between the woman and the two siblings. As far as I remember she was single and had no family of her own, so no doubt she liked children she knew to visit her.

When the children entered her living room the little boy asked her who the elderly lady at the top of the stairs in the hallway was. Not wanting to frighten the boy, she told him she had a visitor



staying who liked to look out of the window at the top of the stairs. Later that same day or at some other time she confided in the girl that the boy had seen her late mother. She told the girl she often saw her mother standing at the top of the stairs looking out of the window, and she just accepted it was her mother's ghost.

Rod Williams

Talgarth, Powys

Crocks

Regarding Mythconceptions # 231 [FT374:25]: we were told to put terracotta/slate shards in flowerpots because anywhere else in the garden they are perilous. Animals, faces and human hands do not benefit from tetanus-prone vicious gashes. But we were told to add a mixture of various gravel sizes/types, and old shell/eggshell, and a little wood ash/chip with sand. This was supposedly all an asset while the plant established, deterring molluscs, which if foiled above the lip of a pot will attempt access via the base. It also makes freeing a pot-bound specimen considerably less hassle, and salvage of bolting tree roots simple.

Lucy Brown

Pilton, Somerset

The Sandling Road Horror

Theo Paijmans's fine article on the Sandling Road Horror [FT374:30-31] reveals a case more complex than is sometimes presented.

I suspect the solution may have more to do with Michael Persinger than the Prince of Darkness. Earthlights are most commonly white or orange (Albert Budden, *Electric UFOs*, 1998, p.173, after Paul Devereux and Paul McCartney), and can affect the temporal lobes of the brain, causing a range of hallucinatory figures, although the lights themselves are real. In this particular case we have "reddish-yellow" lights and golden mists. I don't know if this part of Kent is on a fault line, but another source of EM energy could have been the airfield at Lympne.

Two other "winged weirdo" cases are relevant here. In 1988 a man called Tony Burfield encountered the Quantock Horror – a UFO with bat's wings, no less. According to Budden, this area of Somerset rests on fault lines, and the sighting took place between two rows of high-voltage electricity pylons (op. cit., p.246f.) And in 1979, near Caddington village next to Luton, five children claimed to have seen a bird-man-bear chimæra by a wood which had yielded disturbing evidence of ritual animal sacrifice in 1963, in the wake of the Satanic she-nanigans up the road at Clophill (Kevin Gates, *The Paranormal Diaries: Clophill*, 2014, p.65f.) Two things are important here: firstly, the creature appeared to levitate on a yellow beam of light; secondly, there are not one but two electrical substations close by, at Chaul End and Caddington itself. EM discharges causing something like ball lightning, which then played havoc with the witnesses' delicate temporal lobes, are a better explanation than an external entity: after all, this happened very close to the M1 motorway, and no drivers reported seeing a monster in the sky.

As for the notorious evil atmosphere at Clophill, this may well have been caused by brain-scrambling EM emissions from the large FLR-9 antenna array nearby at Chicksands Air Force Base, known locally as "The Elephant Cage" (Gates, op. cit., p.52f, 159f.) Here, from Budden, is a description of an EM light phenomenon at the famous poltergeist house in Enfield: "I was bloody petrified... like there was somebody standing right by me and watching..." (*Psychic Close Encounters*, 1999, p.93). This is Clophill to a T.

But why do experiencers confabulate chiropteranthropoids (bat-people) in the first place? I couldn't tell you. Experimental subjects, though, exposed to the 4Hz and 9Hz magnetic field conditions reported visual imagery of "bats flying in the air" (Albert Budden, *Psychic Close Encounters*, p.109).

Richard George

St Albans, Hertfordshire



Veni Vidi Vici

Mat Coward raised the 'special connection' between Cæsar's famous quotation and Britain [FT374:75]. The answer is: there isn't and never has been. Cæsar used it in connection with what was (by his standards) a minor policing action on the Black Sea coast, done to show that he took his general role as an elected official seriously. However, so obsessed are the British with their sense of des-

tiny that we would love it if he had said this about us. That is the only 'connection'. Recently, some 'evidence' was found of 'his camp' on the southern tip of Thanet (more plausibly a local stronghold taken by one of Cæsar's lieutenants, such as Labienus). In the context of this, I could not resist desecrating a cover of a Ladybird book (with apologies).

Mark Samuel PhD FSA MCifA
Ramsgate, Kent

Trots in space – again

The little book by Juan Posadas, *Textes choisis (1962-1980), Suivi du Manifeste du Marxist Ufologist Group (2001)*, published in French by Scriblerus Club Editions in March 2018 – available on eBay for a modest 6 euros – offers five

political contributions by Posadas but also by two others. The first is the full text of Posadas's *Les soucoupes volantes, le processus de la matière et de l'énergie, la science et le socialisme* which was analysed by Matt Salusbury in 2003 [FT176:40-45; see also FT371:30]. The French version available online differs from the British short-

ened version published in the Trotskyist journal *Red Flag* in at least one important detail. In the French (probable) original, we learn that “Capitalism has no interest for UFOs and makes therefore no research into the subject. There is no interest for it in dealing in these things because it is neither profitable nor useful to it” (“le capitalisme n’a pas d’intérêt pour les OVNI et ne fait en conséquence pas de recherche sur le sujet. Il n’a pas intérêt à s’occuper de ces choses parce que ce n’est ni rentable ni utile pour lui”). And Posadas extends this judgment to the communist bureaucracy: “Neither the capitalist system nor the bureaucracy have an interest in doing research in this subject because they cannot gain any benefit from it, either commercial, political, or military”. However, Salusbury quoting Posadas from the English version, gives a reversed picture: “Capitalism doesn’t interest the UFO pilots, which is why they do not return. Similarly, the Soviet bureaucracy (doesn’t interest them) as they don’t have a perspective” [for the liberation of the masses]. I don’t know why Posadas reversed his position, but the latter is after all more logical.

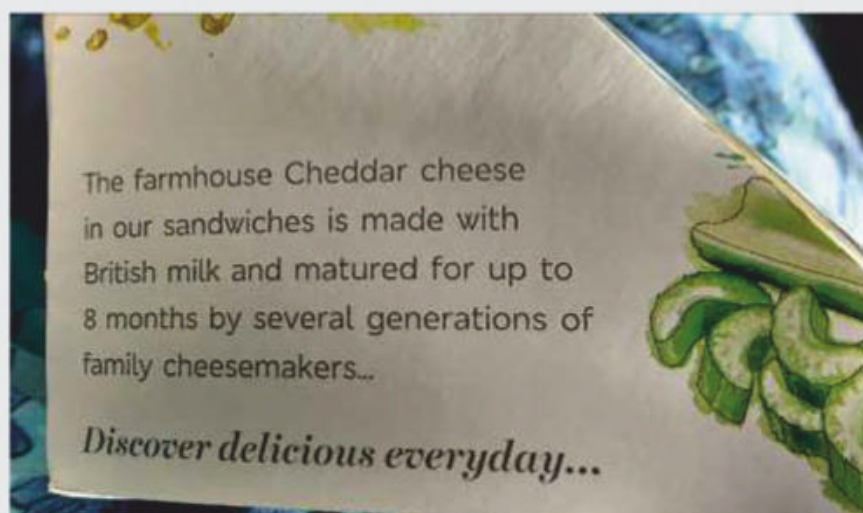
The second text of interest for our purpose is the short Manifesto of the British Marxist Ufologist Group (MUG), a 1998 breakaway from the Trotskyist Socialist Workers’ Party. Basically, its first part is more or less an “orthodox” Posadist view of aliens and UFOs, that is the extraterrestrials are necessarily advanced Communists – which explains the debunking by our authorities. The second part is far stranger: from a few indications found in Marx’s writings, the MUG concludes that he was “almost certainly” an alien: “It seems probable that he took his name from his spacecraft: MARSX, and that Engels was in fact a computer. In the same way, a rumour says that when Che Guevara’s hands were cut off, it was discovered his bones were in silicone (or perhaps a mistranslation in French for silicon?). Likewise, Tony Cliff had two heads” (an allusion to the fact he was a Zionist before becoming a Trotskyist?). As the MUG claims also “to make the Revolution easier by putting

Swift turnover

This label on a Marks & Spencer Farmhouse Cheddar Cheese & Celery sandwich made me laugh. Several generations of cheese-makers in eight months? What are they, fruit flies?

Dave Nilsson

By email



pressure on the Labour Party so that it becomes more open about the questions dealing with UFOs”, I’m not convinced the above positions can really help...

Claude Maugé

Figeac, France

Bentley framed?

The case of Derek Bentley is well known: how he was executed in 1953 in dubious circumstances after he supposedly shouted out “Let him have it!” to his accomplice Chris Craig during a burglary on a warehouse in Croydon, south London, resulting in PC Sidney Miles being shot and killed. It has been debated and argued ever since whether he meant “Give him the gun” or “Shoot him”. However, it has been alleged that the last surviving policeman on duty that night said – as he was dying in hospital in 2015 – that Bentley said nothing of the sort and that police had concocted the “Let him have it” quote to secure a conviction and eventual execution to avenge the death of their colleague. This deathbed confession supposedly occurred at St George’s Hospital in Tooting, south London, and has since been relayed by staff there at the time, and other patients as well.

My friend, an amateur historian who was a patient on the same ward, overheard nurses

during the night shift wondering how that former policeman could live with himself for 62 years, knowing that he had sent an innocent man to his death.

My friend went up and asked what they were discussing, and the nurses told him this story and how the confession had been made the morning before. He gave them a synopsis of the case and told them the background of what had occurred that night in 1953. They had never heard of it before, and were unlikely to as they were only in their early 20s. This sounds convincing; why would the nurses make it up, when they had never even heard of the tragic Bentley case?

Phil Brand

London

Class and the paranormal

Re the article regarding Zak Bagans’s *Demon House* documentary [FT372:56-57]: it occurs to me that the parapsychological mainstream only criticise people like Mr Bagans because they don’t fit the bill, the list of things parapsychologists want to be perceived as. They all seem desperate to convince a small set of professional scientists dominated by an ingrained culture of materialism of the merits of their field of study, and deride

those who aren’t interested in doing the same. To convince these mainly middle class, predominantly secular, conventionally educated academics, folk like the Society for Psychical Research and Ms Hill feel they must ape them.

When they see lower class, self-educated, often religiously inclined non-academics like Bagans investigating what they seem to feel is ‘their’ subject, they either ignore their efforts or attack them as frauds, even though their worldview is often closer to that of most subjects of paranormal activity. In doing so they express an inbuilt contempt for the very people whose experiences they are studying. After all, is it not obvious that the religiously inclined are more likely to share such experiences with others, and therefore constitute the greater part of those reporting them?

Though their methods may not be the same, the entrepreneurial efforts of such TV investigators manage to fund far more investigations than academic parapsychology. Though their conclusions are couched in religious or New Age terms that do not fit what the SPR consider a respectable worldview, it is ridiculous to dismiss an investigation just because its conclusions are expressed within a particular worldview. After all, you would not dismiss an investigation because its conclusions were couched in materialist terms. It is doubly ridiculous to dismiss the recorded evidence from an investigation and imply fakery because of the worldview of the investigator, or because of the funding method. Any funder could potentially cause bias.

I suggest parapsychology ditches its obsession with proving validity to a tiny clique of Western scientists, as though this will somehow make paranormal experiences ‘true’. Truth is achievable only by setting aside differences in schema, and weighing up all provided evidence fairly, to lead towards a balanced conclusion. I also suggest that if academic parapsychologists really believe their more capitalistic brethren are faking their investigations, that the SPR or similar bodies acquire proof that this is the case.

Dean Teasdale

Gateshead

IT HAPPENED TO ME...

First-hand accounts of strange experiences from *FT* readers

Computer angel

I have an old friend who lives at the other end of the country, so we are in the habit of chatting via Skype video link once a week. About two years ago we were doing just that, and fell into a deep discussion about a close friend of hers who at that time was having grave troubles in his personal life. As we mutually pondered his plight I saw a bright green light beginning to form above her head. I asked her what it was – but she couldn't see it and didn't know what could be causing it. As I watched, the light grew into a green swirling shape above her, expanding horizontally and weaving in continuous motion, like smoke or water. I watched it on my laptop screen for about two minutes, while providing a commentary on it for my bemused friend who still couldn't see anything unusual in her room, until it finally dwindled and disappeared. The light showed on my computer screen as a flat, pixelated, moving shape – but the odd thing was that it illuminated items in the room behind her. A picture, her bookshelf, the dresser all shone with reflected green light as it moved near them, but the reflected light was not pixelated, just showing a normal glow off the surfaces.

I have asked various techie friends if they could explain the phenomenon, to no avail. Perhaps other readers might be able to, or have experienced something similar. In our many years of Skyping (and always on the same computers which are not faulty in any way) I have seen nothing like it before or since. The unfortunate friend we were discussing died unexpectedly less than two years afterwards.

Merrily Harpur
Cattistock, Dorset

Lost text

The roundup of late delivered correspondence [FT374:20-21] made me remember



an incident from sometime between 2008 and 2010. I was working in the laboratory of a civil engineering company and received a text message from a former work colleague about someone she had just seen at a wedding reception – to which I sent a reply. I didn't get an email back and pretty much forgot about it. Then a few weeks later I got what appeared to be a pretty random text message from her. When I looked at the date, I found it was sent on the same date as the original message and was a reply to my message. Whereabouts in the æther had it been all that time?

Gary Stocker
By email

Perth phantom

In the mid-1970s I was an enthusiastic cyclist. One sunny morning I headed north to Birnam [Perthshire] (famed for its association with *Macbeth*), swung west towards Amulree, then returned home to Bankfoot via Glenalmond, a trip of about 30 miles (48km). Four miles from home I dismounted to ascend a steep hill. At the top to my left there was a narrow track that led to a farm. Reaching the top, I paused to watch a low jet plane fly across when something caught my eye. It was

“On the table were various magazines and inside one magazine lay Sparky's certificate...”

a man approaching from the farm track. As he crossed the road 10 yards in front of me, I noticed he was dressed as an old-fashioned farm worker. His boots made no sound as they hit the road. He looked straight ahead, never in my direction. I would say he was in his late 50s. He wore a bonnet and glasses, a thick tweed jacket, corduroy trousers with string tied round each trouser leg just below the knee, and had gaiters over heavy black boots. In one hand he carried a small flagon and round his shoulder hung a khaki haversack. He climbed the high grass bank, put his hand on the fence wire and climbed over, making not a sound. As he entered the field, he simply vanished. For a few minutes I stood holding my bicycle, staring at the fence in disbelief and incomprehension. I pushed my bike about 20 yards, then laid it down and walked back to the spot where the man had crossed the road, hoping to find physical evidence of what I had seen, but the roadside grass and earth

in the field were undisturbed.

Thomas Brown
Bankfoot, Perthshire

Last minute reprieve

In the mid 1990s, I was returning to the United States after a stay in England and I wanted to take my cat Sparky with me. She had “adopted” me one day when I returned from work. No one knew where she had come from, but from then on she became my best friend. I took Sparky to the vet for her rabies injection, so that we would have no trouble getting her through customs. The certificate of vaccination had had to be ordered three weeks in advance from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. On the day of the injection, all went well and Sparky was in good health. We now had only two days left before departure. Returning home, I couldn't find the certificate anywhere. I called the vets, and the assistant assured me I had left with the certificate in my hand. A further call to the taxi company that had driven me home also drew a blank. By now it was too late to order another certificate. I was distraught, thinking that I might have to leave Sparky behind.

That night, I dreamed I was standing in the vet's surgery looking at a glass table (no such table actually exists). On the table were various magazines and inside one magazine lay Sparky's certificate. I woke up the next morning with my dream still vivid, but also the veterinary assistant's assurance that I had left with the certificate. With no more than four hours left until my flight, I wasn't sure whether to call the vets anyway. Then the phone rang. It was the assistant, who told me that a customer had found my certificate between the pages of a magazine in the waiting room.

Sheila O'Connor
San Francisco, California

Fortean Traveller



114. The Imbolc Fire Festival

ROB GANDY heads to the West Yorkshire village of Marsden, where the cold and darkness of February are banished by the blazing fires of the goddess Brigid...

It was snowing on the top of Saddleworth Moor as we began the descent down the A62 Manchester to Huddersfield road into the village of Marsden, where the snow turned into more of a cold, sleety rain. Yet despite the inclement weather we knew that we were in for a warm reception, because we were going to see the Imbolc Fire Festival that is held there every two years on the first Saturday in February. My wife and I had planned ahead, booking into a local pub, knowing full well that the festival has attracted crowds of 3,000 people in the past.

The Celtic festival of Imbolc takes place on 1 February, and marks St Brigid's Day and the end of winter. However, its Marsden incarnation is a modern initiative which began as a community celebration in 1993. It was an annual festival until 2014, when it switched to being a biannual event. This was because the small band of organisers found that it was becoming



too much to organise it and raise all the money needed every year (approximately £7,000). Everything is done by volunteers, except the fireworks, where a pyrotechnic company steps in to provide the display.¹ It takes place almost whatever the weather, so there was little fear of cancellation.

The Festival began at around 7pm with a torch-lit procession from Marsden railway station. The crowds gathered outside the Railway Inn beforehand, with a sprinkling wearing pagan attire, and were entertained by musical bands, giants and other amusements. The procession was led by 'druids', giants and fire performers wearing a variety of masks and looking quite menacing. The crowd followed behind, over the railway bridge and along Reddisher Road towards the Standedge (pronounced *Stannidge*) Tunnel and Visitor Centre. Many carried lanterns in the shapes of Suns, Moons, fish and animals – foxes, for example. Presumably most had been made by locals in the run-up to the festival, when lantern-making workshops are held for participants. It was a real family affair, with lots of children, adults and old fogies like us. It would have been pitch black if it hadn't been for the torches and lanterns, so everyone was careful about where they stepped, particularly to avoid the many huge puddles that pock-marked the lane. I couldn't help but wonder what the passengers on the trains that passed alongside us on the other side of the wall thought was going on as they went through the village!

The last yards to the entrance to the Visitor Centre were marked by lanterns on either side of the road, and the Centre itself could be seen below. A sharp turn and steep hill took everyone down to the car park, where the fire performers had gathered upon the embankment on the other

ABOVE: Masked participants parade through Marsden to celebrate the end of winter and the coming of spring.





OLI SCARFF / AFP / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE: After the defeat of Jack Frost by the Green Man, a firework display takes place, signifying the emergence of the Sun. **BELOW:** A splendid fiery hare.

Imbolc: Fire and fertility

Imbolc is a pre-Christian Celtic festival that traditionally marked the beginning of spring, falling midway between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox, and usually held on 1 or 2 February; it is one of the four seasonal festivals of the Celtic year, along with Beltane, Lughnasadh and Samhain.

The name Imbolc (pronounced “Im’olk”) is widely thought to derive from an Irish word meaning “in the belly”, referring to the pregnancy of ewes; another theory has its origin in “Oimelc”, or ewes’ milk, while still others relate to words for ‘budding’ or ‘ritual cleansing’; whatever Imbolc’s true etymology, it was a date of great importance in the pre-Christian calendar and one with a clear connection to fertility and the farming year. As in a number of other Celtic festivals, fire was a key element of Imbolc, particularly as it was the holy day of the goddess Brigid (Brigit, Brid), who was associated with fire and fertility. The lighting of Imbolc fires not only celebrated the goddess’s restorative powers but the lengthening days, the growing power of the Sun and the imminent arrival of spring.

As well as the lighting of fires and candles, Imbolc customs included feasts and special foods, spring cleaning, weather divination, visits to holy wells and the parading of a doll-like figure representing Brigid from house to house. A popular tradition was the making of a Brigid’s Cross – a symbol that arguably predates Christianity – from rushes. In the Christian liturgical year, Candlemas – also known as the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord Jesus and the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary – falls at the same time as Imbolc; the fact that the latter is also known as St Brigid’s Day would suggest that the pagan festival and its presiding goddess were Christianised at some point, with the lighting of candles in church an echo of the Imbolc fires.

In recent years, Neo-pagans and Wiccans of all kinds have revived the festival – as has the wider community in Marsden.



PAUL STEVENSON / FLICKR / CREATIVE COMMONS



ABOVE: A performer at the Fire Festival – or perhaps a contemporary manifestation of the goddess Brigid – wields her flaming torches.

side of the wall. All wore black, hooded costumes with white masks. The area was marked out with metal containers, each belching forth flames, which were used to replenish the torches and other related paraphernalia. When the crowd had gathered, the performers began choreographed displays with their torches, with the most skilled wielding long fiery whips which emitted sparks as they hit the ground and whirled in the air. All of the time there was a background of rhythmic drumming, which helped build up a terrific atmosphere.

Eventually the display came to an end, with much applause, and the crowd's anticipation went up a few notches. This was the main focus of the event, and entering stage left to a chorus of boos came a giant, illuminated Jack Frost, accompanied by several of his minions wearing animal masks and carrying spears. Bright, white firework effects symbolised that Winter was in control. But wait! What do we see? Entering stage right, was the giant Green Man, with a huge lantern head, set to fight Jack Frost to the death. He too had armed supporters, wearing headdresses with Sun designs. The inevitable confrontation

There was a battle between Jack Frost and the Green Man

saw a pitched battle between Jack Frost and the Green Man, and their respective followers, with the two giants wrestling and grappling with one another like heavyweight boxers. Who would win? *Spoiler alert!* The Green Man always wins! And so Winter (in the form of Jack Frost) was banished and Spring (in the form of the Green Man) gained the day.

This was reinforced by the introduction of a large Sun figure surrounded by spectacular fireworks. In the background was a fire sculpture of a cuckoo (chosen because of its relevance to spring as well as to thank the Cuckoo's Nest community charity shop in Marsden, which had helped to fund the festival). There followed a top-notch firework display that suitably "wowed" the crowd, sending the majority of us happily home, retracing our steps along the three-

quarter-of-a-mile route and then dispersing across the village.

The celebrations continued at the Centre for the performers, pagans and those hardy types who didn't have kids to put to bed, trains to catch or a glass or two waiting; these featured bands and dance groups. Yes, a good night was had by all, and everyone noted in their diaries that the Fire Festival would next return in 2020.

The topography of the Pennines means that Marsden, sitting between high moors on either side, is not the easiest of places to get to, but it is well worth making the trip. Most people will have seen these moors, and caught a glimpse of Marsden below, because they were the site of Royston Vasey's local shop in *The League of Gentlemen*.²

The main visitor attraction is the Standedge Tunnel and Visitor Centre. The Standedge Tunnels are four parallel tunnels beneath the Pennines; three are railway tunnels and the other is a canal tunnel. The latter is on the Huddersfield Narrow Canal and is the longest, deepest and highest canal tunnel in Britain: 5,500 yards (5,000m) long, 636ft (194m) underground at its deepest

point, and 643ft (196m) above sea level.³

Marsden also hosts other significant events, with its Cuckoo Festival in April (and a Jazz Festival in October)⁴. The story goes that long ago the people of the village were aware that when the cuckoo arrived, so did the spring and sunshine. Therefore they tried to keep spring going forever by building a tower around the cuckoo; but just as the last stones were about to be laid, the cuckoo flew away. If only they had managed to build the tower a little bit higher!⁴

On the Saturday, just after we had arrived, the older local man nursing a cigarette outside the back door of our pub told us that the weather was never ever any good for Imbolc, but that it would be fine the next day. And it transpired that the Sunday was indeed bright and sunny. Perhaps the Fire Festival had worked its magic, banishing Jack Frost and welcoming in the Green Man of Spring. I'd like to think so.

♦ **ROB GANDY** is a visiting professor at the Liverpool Business School, John Moores University and a regular contributor to FT.

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WHY FORTEAN?



FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing how scientists argued according to their own beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity

in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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ON SALE 28 FEB 2019

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL

A troop of monkeys that stoned a man to death in the village of Baghpat in Uttar Pradesh, northern India, presented police with a conundrum, as the victim's relatives were seeking criminal charges against the "culprits". Dharampal Singh, 72, was collecting firewood when he stumbled upon the monkeys, who pelted him from the treetops with more than 20 bricks from a derelict building. Hit on the head and chest, he died in hospital later. The police said that if the monkeys were arrested and faced formal charges, they should in theory he accorded the same legal rights as any human defendant; an investigation would then have to try and determine which animal struck the fatal blow. "How can we register a case against the monkeys?" asked the local police chief. "It would make us a laughing stock." *timesofindia.com, 20 Oct; (London) Times, 22 Oct 2018.*

A 12-day-old boy died after being snatched from his mother and bitten on the neck and head by a monkey in northern India. The boy's mother was breastfeeding him at their home in Runkata on the outskirts of Agra when the primate entered the house and grabbed him. His mother, Neha, gave chase along with family members, but the infant, named Sunny, was later found lying blood-soaked on a neighbour's roof. He was rushed to hospital, but was declared dead on arrival. A local environmental activist said monkeys were becoming more aggressive as a result of being displaced from their natural habitats, destroyed by the expanding city. *BBC News, 15 Nov; D.Telegraph, 16 Nov 2018.*

Buddhist monk Rahul Walke Bodhi, 35, was seated beneath a tree in Ramdegi forest in western India for morning prayers on 11 December when a leopard pounced on him, causing fatal injuries. Two other devotees meditating with him at the time escaped unscathed to alert police. The forest, roughly 825km (513 miles) west of Mumbai, falls within a protected reserve for big cats where four other fatal attacks had occurred within a month. Hundreds of people, a heat-seeking drone and sharpshooters riding elephants took part in a lengthy hunt in 2018 for a tigress believed to have killed 13 people in Maharashtra. It was killed in November. Between 2014 and 2017, 1,144 people were killed by animals across India as jungles and grasslands continue to shrink. *rte.ie/news, 13 Dec; Times, 14 Dec 2018.*

An unbearably sad story from China. In early September a man, surnamed He, bought an insurance plan worth one million yuan (£110,000), naming his wife as the beneficiary, without her knowledge. On 19 September, the 34-year-old used a borrowed vehicle to fake his own death in a car crash. The car was found in a river, though his body was not recovered. Mr He was found to have loans of more than 100,000 yuan. On 11 October, the bodies of his 31-year-old wife, their four-year-old son and three-year-old daughter were found in a pond near their home. In a suicide note posted on WeChat (a social media platform), she wrote that she was coming to "accompany" him, adding that she had "only ever wanted our family of four to be together". Mr He turned himself over to police in Xinhua county, Hunan province, the next day. He had earlier posted a video online in which he was crying and saying he had borrowed money to pay for treatment for his three-year-old daughter, who suffered from epilepsy. He was detained on charges of insurance fraud and intentional damage to property. *BBC News, 17 Oct 2018.*

An enraged wild boar attacked and killed Srun Chea, 47, after his dog chased it in a forest in Koh Kong province's Thmor Baing district in Thailand. At around 7am on 24 October, the victim was crossing the forest with his daughter and dog to collect fish from his fishing net in a rice field. The dog spotted the boar and chased after it, causing it to go after its master instead. His young daughter managed to run away and raise the alarm, but it was too late to save her father. *khmertimeskh.com, 24 Oct 2018.*

A knight re-enactor died in a freak accident when he impaled himself on his own lance while competing at a Renaissance fair. Peter Barclay, also known as Master Terafan Greydragon, was performing a trick on horseback at an event in Kentucky. Attempting to spear a paper plate on the ground, his metal-tipped lance hit the ground and flipped back towards him, impaling him under the sternum. *Adelaide Advertiser, 12 Oct 2018.*

A woman in her 30s died after becoming stuck in the door of a clothing recycling bin in Vancouver on 23 July. It was the third such death in Vancouver since 2015. *Victoria (BC) Times Colonist, 25 July 2018.*



Home Study Course Started A 20-Year Writing Career



Heather Burnside took a home study Creative Writing Course with The Writers Bureau in 1999. 20 years on Heather is still writing and has recently signed another three-book deal with *Aria Fiction* at *Head of Zeus*.

Can creative writing really be taught? Manchester based author, Heather Burnside, is proof that it can. She says, "the skills I gained on The Writers Bureau's course have been invaluable. During my studies I learnt writing techniques that have stood me in good stead as an author and copywriter. It gave me the knowledge and confidence to pursue writing as a career."

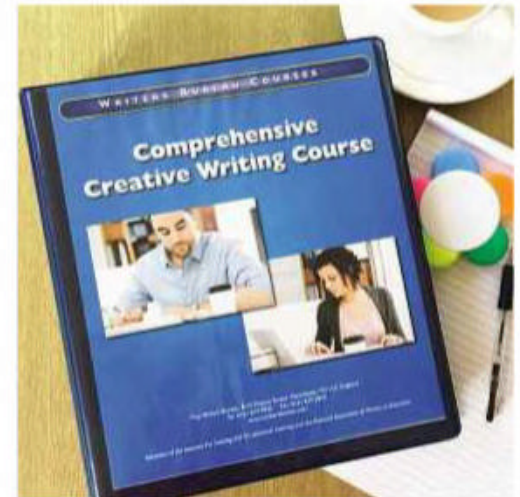
The course is very practical and students are encouraged to submit work to publications as soon as their tutor feels they are ready. This means students can start earning from their writing very quickly. The Writers Bureau take this side of the course very seriously and even offer an amazing money back guarantee if students don't earn their fees back from published work by the end of their studies.

"The flip side to this is that I became inundated with work at various points in the course," explains Heather. "This is because, if you have an article accepted by a magazine then it makes sense to follow it up with another while your name is fresh in the editor's mind."

During the course Heather wrote the first three chapters of her book, *Nightclubbing*, drawing on her experiences of growing up on one of the toughest estates in Manchester. At the time she approached several publishers but no offers were forthcoming. Undaunted, she continued writing articles as well as setting up a writing services business offering proofreading and copywriting.



Even though she was enjoying her work, Heather's heart lay with writing a novel. So, after a while, she dusted off her original manuscript, reworked it, changed the title and her first gritty crime novel, *Slur*, was created. She independently published it on Amazon in 2014, shortly followed by two more books making up the *The Riverhill Trilogy*.



In 2016 Heather was signed to *Aria Fiction* at the *Head of Zeus*. They published her second set of books, *The Manchester Trilogy* as well as republishing *The Riverhill Trilogy*. She's just recently signed another three-book deal with them.

"I'm sure that without The Writers Bureau I would never have had the confidence to self-publish my first novel. They taught me valuable skills, which I put to good use every time I write. I am now lucky to be earning a living doing something I love, and it all started when I studied the Creative Writing Course."

For those wanting to explore creative writing as a career option then The Writers Bureau Comprehensive Writing Course is a good place to start. It covers all types of writing from articles to short stories, novels to scripts so people can discover what they're good at and where their passions lie. Information is free and you can enrol on a 15-day trial to make sure the course is for you. Visit their website or call them today! You never know where it will take you.

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